NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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PRAXATEL, OF THE IRON ARM

OR, NICK CARTER FOLLOWS AN OPEN TRAIL

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

The attendants rushed to the aid of the doctor, and in a few moments Ironarm was bound firmly and carried to one of the padded cells in the institution.

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PRAXATEL, OF THE IRON ARM;

OR,

Nick Carter Follows an Open Trail.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MISSING HEIRESS.

"Star-chamber proceedings! That's what I call it!" said Chick, with some heat, as he dropped into a chair opposite Nick Carter, in the latter's study, and bit savagely at the end of a cigar, while he scratched a match against the sole of his shoe with the disengaged hand.

"It is true, then?" asked Nick, smiling across the room at his angry assistant.

"True? Of course it's true. The whole push—all three of them—were liberated on bail yesterday morning. Cash bail it was, too. I cannot understand why a judge should not have more sense than to——"

"Tut, tut, Chick! The court did not know as much about the characters of those people as we do. All that he had to go upon was the bare wording of the charge against them. And, besides, when all is said, I doubt very much if we could have convicted them of anything that would have been worth while."

"There is Carroll Burbank. He cannot live. Praxatel—or Ironarm, as you call him—should have been held for that crime, if for nothing else."

"Oh, well, it won't do you any sort of good to sputter about it, Chick. If the three of them are out on bail, and have jumped their bail, as you seem to anticipate they have done, what of it? We have done our duty in the matter."

"There is the woman who impersonated Madelaine Congdon. Rose, they called her—Rose what, I wonder? Anyhow, there should have been some punishment for her. She is as cold-blooded a villain as I ever saw, if she is a beautiful woman."

"Not so cold-blooded and not so great a villain as that other one, I think," remarked the detective.

"You mean Vera Praxatel?"

"Yes, of course. She did not have much to say, but she could bite, and she could sting. Praxatel, of the iron arm, the French schemer, is bad enough in all conscience, and the woman Rose is dangerous enough, but for deliberate and unscrupulous cruelty, and studied wicked-

ness, commend me to Vera Verona, the wife of Praxatel."

"I don't know but that you are quite right about that, Nick, after all," admitted Chick. "The best one in the bunch, by far, was that other one. Thornie, they called her; but even she was bad enough. You mark my words, Nick, we will hear from that outfit again."

"Possibly," admitted the detective.

Then he lost himself in a brown study for a moment, at the end of which he looked up rather quickly and said:

"They had all last night to work unmolested, didn't they?"

"They sure did," replied Chick.

The detective looked at his watch.

"Half-past nine," he mused. "I suppose, Chick, we might safely calculate that Madelaine Congdon and her sister Elsie are up, and have had their breakfast by this time; don't you think so?"

"Sure."

"Well, if you will order around the automobile, you and I will take a ride together, and we will stop at the Congdons, and see if the young ladies wouldn't like to go with us. A spin out along the Boston Road would do neither of them any harm."

"All of which means that it has occurred to you as a possibility that the Congdons may be in some danger, since the Praxatels and their two confederates are at large; eh?" remarked the assistant, rising and moving toward the door.

"I think it would be as well if we put them on their guard," replied the detective evasively.

Chick left the room, to carry out the order that was given him, and the detective relapsed into a brown study, from which he did not rouse himself until Chick appeared at the door again to announce that the automobile was at the door.

They dismissed Bob, the chauffeur, and the detective took the wheel himself; nor were they long in making the run to the Congdon residence, which is just off Fifth Avenue, not many blocks north of the Plaza.

The butler responded to Nick's summons at the door. A new servant he was, too, Nick discovered the moment he appeared.

"The Misses Congdon—either or both of them," said the detective, stepping forward to pass inside. But the butler barred his way, holding the door open in such a manner that his own rather adipose figure filled the aperture.

"Not at home," he replied bruskly; and he would have closed the door in the detective's face had not the latter put out one foot and held it ajar.

Nor was that all he did. He seized the door and pushed it open so suddenly that the stately butler was thrown back, several feet away from it; and then he calmly stepped inside, and closed it behind him.

"Look here, my man," he said severely, "you won't last long in this house if that is a specimen of the manner in which you propose to conduct yourself! Take this card to either or both of the young ladies, and say that I am waiting in the reception-room."

"I tell you they're not at home!" replied the butler, with some show of temper. "I did not lie to you, although you seem to think I did. The young ladies are not at home. Neither of them is at home, and I was told to admit nobody while they were absent. I think, sir, that it is my duty to take my orders from Miss Congdon, and not from you, whoever you might be."

Nick laughed.

"I rather think you are right about that," he said. "Possibly I was too hasty. Was not my name mentioned when they went out—or went away?"

"I don't know your name, sir."

"Look at the card, then."

The butler did so; and then, without a change of expression, replied:

"Your name was not mentioned, sir. I have never heard it."

"Where did the young ladies go?" asked Nick.

"I do not know, sir."

"When did they go out?"

"I regard that, sir, as being none of your business."

"Well," said the detective, smiling, "possibly you are correct about that, too. All the same, I am a friend of theirs, and I wish particularly to see one or both of them as soon as possible."

The butler deigned him no reply whatever.

There is nothing in the world so stolid and so unresponsive as an upper servant, momentarily in authority; but even upper servants are amenable to the usual human laws, and the detective thrust one hand into his pocket and drew out some coin, from among which he selected a five-dollar gold piece.

He extended it toward the butler, without a word, and, when the latter had accepted and pocketed it, he asked, again:

"When did the young ladies go out? Eh?"

"They went out together, early last evening, sir," replied the butler, now apparently willing to reply to every question that might be asked.

"And have not returned since them?" demanded Nick, in some alarm.

"Miss Elsie has not returned since then, sir. Miss Congdon came back, without her sister, later in the evening——"

"What time?"

"About half-past eleven, sir. I admitted her, and she went directly to her apartments. She told me that she was suffering with neuralgia."

"But, notwithstanding the neuralgia, you say she went out again this morning?"

"She did. Yes, sir."

"At what time?"

"Really, sir, I do not exactly understand why you should——"

"At what time did Miss Congdon leave the house this morning?" demanded Nick, so sharply that the butler started back, in alarm, and replied, with some haste:

"At half-after seven, sir."

"Did she go out alone?"

"She did, sir."

"In her carriage, or an automobile?"

"She walked, sir."

"Did she say where she was going?"

"She did not, sir."

"Or when she would return?"

"She had a small hand-bag with her, and she said to me, as she passed out at the door, that she might not return for several days. It was then that she told me that I was to admit nobody to the house during her absence, and that I was to reply to all calls for her, or her sister, that they were not at home."

"Are you *sure* that it was Miss Congdon who said that to you?"

"Certainly, sir. Who else could it have been?"

"Did you see her face?"

"I don't think I noticed it particularly, sir. I did think that it was some swollen from the neuralgia, however."

"But you had no doubt that she was Miss Congdon. had you?"

"Certainly not."

"Where is Miss Congdon's maid?"

"She went away with the young ladies yesterday evening, sir."

"Ah!" said Nick, somewhat relieved. "That sounds as if they really did intend to pay a visit somewhere."

"Excuse me, sir, but I am quite positive that they expected to do nothing of the sort at that time. The maid's services were required in the line of some purchases they were to make, and that is why she accompanied them."

"I thought you said it was evening when they went out last?"

"I have been taught, sir, to refer to every hour after twelve o'clock at midday as evening, sir," replied the butler, with dignified displeasure.

"Well, then," ejaculated the detective impatiently, "where is Mrs. Belknap, the chaperon?"

"She also accompanied them, sir."

"Yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"And of them all, Miss Congdon was the only one who returned? And even she did not return till after eleven? And she left the house again this morning at half-past seven?"

"Yes, sir, to all of those questions."

"Who waited upon Miss Congdon when she came home last night, if her maid was not here?"

"I don't think anybody did so, sir."

"Why don't you think so?"

"Because, as I have told you, she went directly to her own rooms, and locked herself in, after telling me that she did not wish to be disturbed."

"It all sounds mighty strange, and not at all like what Miss Congdon would be expected to do," mused the detective, half aloud. "I wonder if I am stirring up a mare's nest, or——"

He paused, and was silent a moment. Then quietly, but firmly, he said to the butler:

"I think you had better conduct me at once to Miss Congdon's rooms."

CHAPTER II.

A WOMAN'S DARING DEED.

The butler could only stare at the detective.

He was too deeply shocked to give his feelings expression in words.

But he did manage to draw himself up stiffly, and with a degree of dignity which would have been a credit to a court chamberlain he replied, at last:

"I think, sir, that you venture to presume a little too far upon my——"

"Oh, drop all that!" exclaimed the detective impatiently. "There isn't time for that sort of thing now. What is your name?"

"Harrison."

"Well, Harrison, in order to relieve your mind, I will tell you this: I am a friend of both the young ladies—a privileged friend. I am also a detective, although you may not have guessed that. This morning I received information which led me to believe that your mistresses were in some danger, and I came here at once to warn them.

"When I arrive here, I find that both have disappeared, and in a manner which compels me to believe that there is some crooked work going on somewhere.

"If there is, I want to know it. I will take all the responsibility of what you do to aid me upon my own shoulders; and now I wish you to take me at once to the rooms usually occupied by Miss Congdon."

There was something about the detective's manner which compelled obedience, and the butler, without another word of remonstrance, turned and led the way up the wide stairway toward the second floor.

Nick presently found himself in a suite of four rooms, which Miss Congdon reserved to herself, and they were

furnished with that exquisite taste which he had confidently expected.

The suite consisted of the boudoir, the bedroom, the dressing-room, and the bath.

He paused as soon as he had crossed the threshold, and said to the butler:

"Harrison, you may remain with me while I am here, for I understand that your appreciation of your duties would compel you to do that; but you are not to make a remark of any kind, and are not to speak at all, unless I ask you to do so. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

They had entered the boudoir, or parlor, of the suite, and even while the detective was talking his eyes had been busily taking in every detail of the room.

The instant he entered the room he had detected the odor of stale cigarette-smoke—and he knew positively that Miss Congdon never indulged herself in any such habit as smoking.

That was, of itself, enough to assure him that there was some chicanery somewhere; but he already felt assured of that much; he merely desired to make assurance doubly sure.

The woman Rose, to whom reference has already been made, was at large.

She had been released from the clutches of the law early during the preceding day, on a cash bail. Once before in her history she had endeavored to impersonate Madelaine Congdon, and the detective, at this moment of entering the suite of rooms, had no doubt that she had made a second effort in the same direction.

He marveled that she would dare to do so, under the circumstances; but he was, nevertheless, assured in his own mind that she had so dared.

It was plain to him, from what the butler had already told him, that the two young women, accompanied by Mrs. Belknap, the chaperon, and by the maid, had gone out the preceding day to do some shopping—nothing more. There was no doubt that they had intended to return within a reasonable time to their home.

But something had happened to them.

They had not returned.

If the circumstance had been a natural one that they should remain away, the maid would, at least, have been sent home to procure necessary articles for their stay in another place.

But not one of them had returned—that is, not one save *that one* whom the butler had believed to be his mistress, the elder sister.

Mrs. Belknap, a middle-aged woman of conservative ideas and habits, who never permitted herself to do anything that did not have a precedent, could not have been prevailed upon to lend her countenance to any such proceeding.

Neither was it presumable that Madelaine Congdon would return to her home alone at half-past eleven o'clock at night; or that she would hasten to her room, as the butler described; or that she would have left the house again at half-past seven in the morning, afoot; or, in fact, that she would have conducted herself at all as this woman had done whom the butler believed was his mistress.

Plainly, it was the woman Rose who had returned to the house in Madelaine's stead.

But why had she done that?

What was the game now?

There was no appearance of disorder of any kind in that daintily furnished parlor—at all events, there was none that Nick could discover; but, when he had passed on through to the dressing-room and bedroom, he thought there were evidences in each of them that a stranger had been there.

For one thing, in the dressing-room he discovered at once that the closets and the bureaus had been almost entirely stripped of their contents.

In the places where innumerable gowns should have been hanging there were only two or three indifferent-looking garments left; the others had somehow mysteriously disappeared.

It was the same in the case of the drawers of the dressers and bureaus.

They had been practically denuded of their contents; toilet articles had disappeared, and the whole aspect of the room was as if its occupant had gone away for a protracted journey.

Not a great deal of study was required on the part of the detective to determine all of this, and he passed on at once to the bedroom, closely followed by the butler.

The bed had been occupied; there was no doubt of that.

The door of an old-fashioned iron safe, which opened with a key, and which occupied one corner of the bedroom, was open; there was no doubt of that, either.

The detective crossed at once to the safe, and examined it.

The massive key which operated it was in the lock, so the detective had no method of determining whether Miss Congdon had left it there, or had taken it with her, and had, later, been deprived of it.

The point was that the safe was practically empty.

It did not require any great amount of detective art to determine that the safe was the customary depository for Miss Congdon's jewels, and for such cash as she kept on hand in the house; but now there was not a sign of a jewel of any kind in it, nor was there a penny in cash anywhere to be found.

There was no longer the slightest doubt in his mind that it was Rose who had been there, instead of the mistress of the house.

Passing to the bathroom, the detective found that Rose

had also taken the opportunity to cleanse herself from the consequences of her prison life.

Secure in the belief that she could escape from the house undiscovered, she had not hesitated to make use of the opportunity to bathe.

Nick turned to the butler again.

"Answer a few questions for me, Harrison," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"You say it was half-past eleven when the woman whom you supposed to be your mistress came here?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that she came directly to these rooms, telling you that she was suffering with neuralgia, and that she did not wish to be disturbed?"

"Yes, sir."

"What more did she say to you at that time?"

"She told me to close the house and retire."

"And you did that, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is your room? Where do you sleep?"

"At the rear of the house, sir, on the top floor."

"Who is in the habit of sleeping on this floor of the house?"

"Miss Congdon, Miss Elsie, Mrs. Belknap, and Cora, the maid."

"That is all?"

"Yes, sir."

"And all of the persons you mention were absent from home last night?"

"All except Miss Congdon, sir."

"Harrison, you may as well understand at once that it was not Miss Congdon whom you admitted to the house last night. You admitted a stranger, without knowing it. That stranger was a woman named Rose, who had just been liberated from jail, where she was awaiting trial for a crime against Miss Congdon and others."

The butler could only gasp in his astonishment, and the detective continued:

"The woman Rose has the advantage of resembling your mistress so closely that she has attempted to impersonate her once before—to impersonate her and rob her. It was she who came here last night, and whom you admitted to the house. What I am now endeavoring to determine is, how did she get the articles out of the house which have been taken away?"

"I understand you now, sir."

"The point is, that she was entirely alone on this floor after you had retired; practically alone in the house, in fact, since the servants were all so far away that they could not have heard her, had she called to them."

"That is quite true, sir."

"So, you see, it is quite evident that, after you had gone to bed, she went down-stairs again, and admitted one or more of her confederates to the house. Then, together, they returned to these rooms, and looted them to their hearts' content, and entirely at their leisure."

"It is terrible, sir, and it is all my fault, too. I should have known. At least, I should have been positive."

"I don't think you are to be blamed for your part in the affair, Harrison," said the detective, not unkindly.

"Thank you, sir—thank you! Please let me do all that I can do to assist you, sir."

"I will, Harrison. The first thing to do is to take me to the rooms occupied by Miss Elsie. I wish to see if they have also taken her effects with them."

The detective found conditions there as he had expected them. The room had been treated in the same manner as her sister's. Plainly, Rose and her confederates had determined to make a clean sweep of it while the opportunity offered.

"But what is the game?" the detective asked himself, again.

Leaving Elsie's room, they descended to the dining-room and inspected the silver, but here nothing had been disturbed at all.

Everything there was as it should be, and the thousands of dollars' worth of plate had not been troubled.

Nick passed into the library, and seated himself, still followed by the butler.

"Harrison," he said, presently, "you impress me as being an entirely honest man."

"I am, sir."

"And as one who tries to do his duty as nearly as possible."

"I do, sir, always."

"Then let me tell you what your duty is at the present moment."

"Yes, sir."

"First, you are to keep this matter of the disappearance of your mistress and her sister an absolute secret; you are to regard their absence from home exactly in the light you viewed it before I arrived here this morning, and you are to make the other servants believe that to be the case."

"Yes, sir."

"Second, you are to remain here, and attend to your duties just as if nothing had happened; but at night you must bring a cot down to the front hall and place it across the door, so that it will be impossible for anybody to enter the house without your knowledge; and, last, if your mistress should return, or if one should appear who claims to be Miss Congdon, you are to receive her as such, without question—*and send word to me instantly.*"

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST REAL CLUE.

"I think I understand you perfectly, sir," replied the butler. "You mean to say, do you not, that if a person should come here, it will not be my mistress, but that I am to receive her exactly in the spirit as if I were deceived?"

"Precisely that."

"I will do my part."

"And you are not timid about remaining on guard, practically alone, day and night?" asked the detective.

"No, sir. I am not afraid. Don't fear that."

"All right, Harrison. I begin to think that you are the right man in the right place."

"I hope so, sir."

"Now, let us try to see if you can furnish me with any clue concerning the probable destination of the ladies when they went out yesterday afternoon."

"I am afraid that I cannot do that."

"You may know something about it without realizing that you know it."

"I hardly think that is likely, sir."

"We will see. What time did they go out?"

"Somewhere about three in the afternoon, sir."

"And how did they go? What sort of conveyance did they take?"

"The victoria."

"Who drove them?"

"Peter, the coachman."

"Was he alone on the box, or did they take the footman?"

"He was alone, sir."

"We will send for him presently."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any idea what they intended to purchase?"

"None whatever, sir."

"Did you overhear any conversation between them, as they were about to start?"

"I merely heard Miss Ethel say that she wished to stop at Laura's before she returned."

"And where is Laura's? Or who is Laura?"

"I haven't an idea, sir."

"What else did you overhear?"

"Miss Congdon replied that she thought it would be impossible, as she wished to visit the hair-dresser before her return."

"Who is her hair-dresser?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Did not Peter bring you some sort of a message when he returned without them?"

"I have not seen him since he drove away with them."

"Doesn't he take his meals with the other servants?"

"He does."

"Well, was he not at dinner last night? Was he not at breakfast this morning?"

"I think he was late, sir, at both meals. At all events, I did not see him."

"Humph!" said Nick. "Suppose you send for him at once, if that is the case."

"I will go after him myself," replied Harrison.

"Very good. Bring him here to the library. In the meantime, I will step outside and speak to my assistant."

Chick had been rather astonished by the long interval that had elapsed since his chief entered the house, and he had already made up his mind that something had happened, when the detective appeared and told him about it.

"I can see through a millstone, when there is a hole in it," he said, when he had heard all that Nick had to tell him.

"Well, what do you think about it?"

"I think that Praxatel and one or more of the women laid in wait for Miss Congdon and her sister, or were, perhaps, watching the house for whatever might turn up, when they came out together, accompanied by the maid and the chaperon."

"Well?" demanded Nick impatiently.

"They followed them then. They watched their opportunity. They discovered a moment when the two young ladies were separated—one at one department of a store, and the other somewhere else. Then they sent a confederate, who represented that he carried a message from one to the other. The rest was easy."

"Oh, well, Chick! That is all right. Anybody might have guessed that much. But how does that help us?"

"I don't know that it helps us at all. But that is the way the trick has been done. They have managed to divide that party of four into four parts. After that they could send every one of them scurrying hither and yon, until they got them where they wanted them. There is your coachman waiting for you on the steps. He looks as if he had been up against it, too."

Nick returned to the house, and took the coachman inside.

"What is the matter with you, Peter?" he demanded.

"I don't know, sir—blessed if I do!"

"Well, we won't discuss that just now. I want you to answer some questions for me."

"I will, sir—if I can."

"You drove the ladies out yesterday to do some shopping, didn't you?"

"I did, sir."

"What time was it when you left the front of the house?"

"Shortly after three, sir."

"Where did you drive to first? What was your first stop after you started the horses?"

"Altman's store, sir."

"Did all four of your passengers leave the victoria there?"

"Yes, sir. They all got out and went into the store together."

"How long a time were they in the store?"

"They're in there yet, for all I know, sir," was the unexpected reply.

"What's that?"

"I haven't seen a hide nor a hair of them since—begging your pardon, sir."

"Do you mean that, Peter?"

"I do, sir."

"How long did you wait there for them?"

"I waited, sir, till long after the store was closed and everybody had gone away. It was seven o'clock by the clock on the corner when I finally made up my mind that they had forgotten all about me, and I decided to come home, sir. You see, the horses had become that restless that there was no doing anything with them, and—well, I didn't know what to do. The horses wanted their feed, the store was closed, and there didn't seem to be any sense in my waiting there any longer. I'll leave it to you, sir."

"What did you do when you arrived home?" asked Nick.

"Put the horses in and watched them fed, sir."

"And after that?"

"I went around the corner, sir."

"At what time?"

"Half-past eight, sir."

"Where did you go?"

"To a saloon where I hang out when I'm off duty. I hadn't any dinner, and——"

"Why did you not go to your dinner, as usual?"

"I was late, sir."

"The cook would have given you something."

"I'm not so sure of that, sir. The cook and me don't get on together any too well."

"So you went around the corner for something to eat—and something to drink, as well?"

"I did, sir."

"Where is that saloon?"

"On Fourth Avenue?"

"Where were you at breakfast-time this morning?"

"In bed, sir."

"Are you in the habit of rising so late, Peter?"

"No, sir."

"What induced you to lie in bed this morning, then?"

"Well, it was this way, if you must have it, sir: I met a lot of fellows around there last night, and we played cards, and I drank a good deal of beer. I don't remember what time it was when I got home, and—well, I didn't wake up this morning at all, at all; that's all about it."

"How did you know that you would not be wanted here, Peter?"

"I didn't think I would be wanted, sir. You see, the ladies didn't come home with me at all last night, and I figured that they had gone somewhere else for the night. That was what emboldened me to stay away the way I did."

"I see. You felt reasonably sure that the ladies would not be at home?"

"Yes, sir. That is it, sir."

"And because you believed that they had remained away from home last night, with some of their friends whom they had encountered in the store, at Altman's, you also felt reasonably sure that you would not be called upon this morning to drive them out. Eh?"

"Sure, sir, you have my idea about it exactly."

"So, when you did wake up this morning, at the usual time, you simply turned over in bed and went to sleep again. Eh?"

"No, sir. I rolled out of bed, I did, and I called down to Jimmy, the hostler's helper he is, and I says to him, says I, 'Jimmy, is anybody stirring around the house?' 'It's as quiet as the grave,' says he. 'Will you wake me, if I'm wanted?' I says. 'I will,' says he; and, with that, I rolled into bed again, sir."

"All right, Peter. Do you think you feel well enough to carry a message down-town for me right away?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will have to take a car, and I will give you two dollars for your trouble; only I don't want you to stop on the way down for more than one drink; eh?"

"Sure, sir, you do understand a man's feeling after a night out, don't you, now? I'll go, sir, and I won't hit it but once till after I have delivered your message."

"That's a good fellow. Now, you wait here a moment, while I go into the library and write the note."

"Yes, sir. I'll do that."

Nick entered the library, seated himself at the desk, and wrote:

"My Dear Inspector: The bearer of this note is a man who, for serious reasons, I wish to have detained, and not permitted to communicate with anybody, no matter who, until after I have seen him again, which will be in the course of two or three hours. Will you do me the favor to take him down-stairs and shut him up for me? If he protests, don't answer him at all. I don't want him to hear the sound of a human voice until I get there—if such a thing is possible. I know you will do this for me, and I will be greatly obliged.

"Nick Carter."

The detective enclosed this in an envelope and sealed it with wax, after which he addressed it to the inspector in charge at headquarters, at 200 Mulberry Street. Then he took it to the coachman.

"Lose no time, now, Peter," he said to him. "Here is the two-dollar bill I promised you. If there should happen to be an answer, bring it to me at once; otherwise, you need not hurry back."

"Thank you, sir—thank you," said Peter.

And Nick Carter, with a smile on his face, watched him as he hurried down the avenue.

CHAPTER IV.

FOLLOWING A SLENDER CLUE.

The remark that the detective made to himself about the departing coachman was not exactly polite, so we will not repeat it here.

He was none the less pleased by his discovery, however, for he was positive that Peter, no matter how guilty or innocent he might be, at least had possessed the certain knowledge that his services would not be required by his mistress or her sister during the preceding evening, or the present morning.

How much more than that he might know did not yet appear, but the detective was determined to find out just what that was.

And we who read about it can imagine the surprise, anger, and fright of the coachman when, somewhat later, he appeared at police headquarters, and presented his letter, only to find that it contained an order for his own detention.

"Harrison," said the detective to the butler, as he was leaving the house, "don't forget about the instructions I have given you."

"I will not, sir," was the reply, in a quiet tone.

"I will return here again before night, but you may not recognize me when I appear. But if I address you by your first name, and in my natural voice, you will know me then."

"No fear of that, sir."

He sprang into the automobile, a moment later, and drove the machine around the corner, as the coachman had described it, toward Fourth Avenue, where he found there was but one saloon within sight; and this he correctly supposed to be the one to which Peter had referred.

Alighting, he went inside, and found that the proprietor was just counting up his cash-register.

"You are Mr. Muldoon, are you not?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. What can I do for you?"

"You can give me about five minutes of your time, if you will be so good," replied the detective.

Muldoon turned around then and stared at Nick.

"For what?" he asked.

"For instance, maybe," said Nick, laughing. "For a good reason, to be sure, else I would not take up your time when you are counting up the profits of yesterday. Have you some good cigars, so that we can smoke while we talk?"

"I have. What do you want to talk about? Hey?"

"Come into the back room, and I will tell you."

The proprietor followed the detective to the back room, where they seated themselves.

Then the detective began at once:

"Miss Congdon's coachman, Peter, is one of your steady customers, isn't he?"

"What the devil is that to you, I'd like to know!" was the instant reply.

"I'll tell you in a moment, Muldoon, if you'll be patient and good-natured."

"Well, I'll be that, if that's all ye want."

"Peter was here last night, wasn't he?"

"Mebby he was, and mebby he wasn't."

"Mr. Muldoon, I am Nick Carter, and I would like very much to have my questions answered."

"Then why in blazes didn't ye say that in the first place?"

"Was Peter here last night?"

"He was."

"What time did he come here?"

"About eight o'clock, I think."

"What time did he leave?"

"When I closed up for the night."

"What time was that? When you answer me, please remember that I am not investigating your license. It is nothing to me if you kept open all night."

"Is that straight, Mr. Carter?"

"Perfectly straight."

"Well, it was almost three o'clock when Peter wint out. There was a gintleman came here to see him, and sure they sat in this room, wid their heads together——"

"That is precisely what I wanted to find out. What time was it when the man came here to see him?"

"It was exactly 'leven-forty, sir. I happen to know the exact time, because it wasn't a minute before he came that Peter asked me if the clock was right, and I looked at me watch, to make sure that it was or wasn't before I answered him. I hadn't got the watch back in me pocket whin the stranger came in."

"Had Peter already told you that he was expecting somebody to meet him here?"

"Sure he hadn't told me once, but a dozen times. Every few minutes he'd come out of the back room and say to me: 'Muldoon, has anybody axed for me yet?' and I'd tell him no, till I got tired of it."

Nick was silent for a moment. He was thinking that it was eleven-thirty when the supposed Miss Congdon returned home, and it was ten minutes later when the stranger called at the saloon to meet Peter.

"How long was the stranger here?" he asked.

"Mebby half an hour."

"You gave me the impression just now that he was here until Peter went away, about three o'clock."

"He came back again the second time."

"Oh! He did, eh?"

"Yes."

"How long was he here the first time, did you say?"

"Mebby half an hour."

"And what time did he return for the second visit?"

"About ten minutes after one, just as I was locking the doors to kape inside the law."

"And he remained considerably more than an hour that time?"

"Yes. The two of them wint away together. It was almost three o'clock then."

"What kind of a looking man was the stranger?"

"He was a big feller. He had red hair and a smooth face."

"Good! I know him. He had the look of a gentleman, didn't he?"

"He did, sir."

"Now, when Peter came into your place, early in the evening, did he appear to have much money with him?"

"Sure, he didn't have a cent, for he hung me up for two rounds, him saying the while that he'd have plenty before he wint out. It was then that he said he expected a man to call for him, and that the man was to pay him some money he'd owed him for years."

"And, after the man had come and gone the first time, did Peter have money?"

"He did that, a-plenty! He paid his score and he treated to bate the band as soon as his fri'nd had gone away and left him."

"How much money should you think he had?"

"He said it was two hundred—and it looked it."

"Do you think the stranger gave him any more money when he came the second time?"

"I dunno."

"Is Peter in the habit of sitting around your place at an hour when he should be on duty at the stable?"

"He has never been in here before, sir—to stay, I mean—only when it was his afternoon off, or after he was sure through with his duties for the day."

"And did you happen to say anything to him about that fact, Mr. Muldoon?"

"I did. Soon after he came into the place."

"Tell me what you said to him, and what he replied."

"I said to him, says I, 'Peter, what's doing? Have ye got the sack?' 'I have not,' says he. 'But you'll get it, all right,' I says to him, 'if ye hang around this place at this time of night. Sure, one of the young ladies will be after wantin' you, and ye won't be there.'

"'Want me, is it?' says he. 'Narry a want'll it be this night, Mul. For why? Because, sure, the young ladies are not at home, and by the same token they won't be home till after lunch-time to-morrow. I've got it straight, Mul, that I'll not be wanted till then.'

"After that, Mr. Carter, I said nothing. You see, it's this way: I depend upon the coachmen, and footmen, and some of the men servants around here for most of me trade; and if I sees one of them talking too much, or lingering too long, I'm always after sending them home. It's money in me pocket to do it; and, besides, they thank me for it afterward."

"So I should suppose. Now, tell me."

"Yes."

"Did Peter and the stranger leave your place together at three o'clock?"

"It wasn't quite three, sir. No. They wint out separate."

"Who went first?"

"The stranger."

"Did Peter happen to mention his name to you?"

"He did not."

"Did he say anything at all about the man after he had gone?"

"Not much. He stood at the door, outside, for a minute or two, and I said to him, 'That's a pleasant sort of a friend ye have, Peter, to be bringing ye the dough like that.'

"'Huh!' says he. 'Sure, I earned it, all right.'

"'How?' says I.

"'Find out,' says he.

"'No divilment, I hope, Peter,' says I, then.

"'What would there be divilment about,' says he, 'wid me a-sittin' here in your place,' says he, 'and a-doin' nothin' at all?' says he.

"'I'm sure I don't know,' I says, 'but it's my experience, Peter, that men like the likes of him that's been here don't go around a-scattering their dough on the wide, wide worrld unless they expect to get it back again, with compound interest. That's my experience, Peter,' says I. And, wid that, I said good night to him and came inside, lockin' the door after me; and that's all I know about it, Mr. Carter."

"Have you seen Peter this morning, Mr. Muldoon?" asked the detective.

"I have not; but my bartender told me he was in between nine and ten o'clock for an eye-opener."

"Go and ask your bartender if Peter had anything to say when he was here this morning, and to tell you what he did say. I will wait here."

Muldoon did as requested; and in a few moments he was back again.

"Mike says he was in here about ten or fifteen minutes," he told the detective, "and that he took two drinks while he was here."

"But what did he *say?*"

"Mike told him it was a leetle early in the morning to be h'isting the booze, and he says that Peter only laughed at him, and said he knew what he was about.

"'I ain't got to worrk this mornin,' he told Mike. 'Me missuses are away, and they won't be back till after lunch-time, so I'm after taking it aisy this morning;' and, wid that, he wint out."

Nick Carter left his chair.

"I am very much obliged to you, Muldoon, for all you have told me," he said, "and now, if you will do me one more favor, and forget all about the fact that we have talked together at all, I will remember it in your favor the first time the opportunity occurs."

"I'll do that, Mr. Carter. I do hope, sir, that Peter hasn't been getting into any serious trouble."

The detective shook his head.

"I don't think it will prove to be very serious," he replied. "He has made a fool of himself, and he will have to pay the piper, that is about all. Good day, Mr. Muldoon."

"Good day, Mr. Carter. Will you have a drink before you go?"

"No. Thank you, just the same."

CHAPTER V.

A CAREFULLY HIDDEN PLOT.

"Half-past eleven," said the detective, as he took his seat under the wheel of the automobile and started the machine forward. "I think, Chick, that we will stop at home for our luncheon. After that we will go to headquarters, to find out what Peter has to say for himself. I don't like to waste the time, but Peter will be all the mellower if he has a chance to worry a little longer."

"Have you found out enough to satisfy you that Peter was in the plot?" asked Chick.

"No. I don't think he was in the plot. I have not thought so at all. He has simply permitted himself to be made a tool of."

"By Praxatel, I suppose?"

"Certainly, by Praxatel. I really think that Peter has been led to believe that the whole thing is some huge joke; that no harm of any sort was intended the young ladies."

"Why do you think that?"

"Well, for one thing, I find that he has said more than once that his 'missuses' were away, but that they should return after luncheon to-day; and I believe that to be what he thinks about it."

"There may be more truth than poetry in that, too, Nick."

"How do you mean?"

"Only that it is possible that Rose intends to show up after luncheon to-day, as Madelaine. She didn't take all those clothes, and jewels, and all that, for nothing."

"Certainly not. She took the jewels because they were valuable. She took the money she found in the safe because she needed it in her business; and she took the clothing because Madelaine needed some of it, and because it might come about at some time that she could make use of it herself."

"This afternoon, for instance."

"No; she won't show up to-day, nor to-morrow, nor next week, nor next month, probably, if she is left to her own devices. She has some deeper scheme than that."

"What deeper scheme than that one could she have?"

"I'm sure I don't know—just at present. I wish I did know. That woman Vera is at the bottom of the whole thing. Whatever the plot and plan may be this time, you may be sure that it originated with her."

"All the same," insisted Chick, "it's a thousand to one that Rose intends, somehow, to impersonate Madelaine Congdon."

"I quite agree with you about that, Chick. The question is, *How?*"

"There isn't but one way, is there?"

"There may be a dozen ways which we know nothing about. I am only sure of one thing."

"What is that?"

"That she will not select the way we *do* know about."

"You mean the way she undertook to accomplish it before?"

"Yes."

"Why not?"

"Because she is afraid of me. She is afraid of you. She is afraid of all of us. She is a smart woman, Chick. Her associates are smart people—among the shrewdest of all the crooks I ever knew. That fellow Ironarm, or Praxatel, as we call him, is a deep scoundrel."

"Well, what of it?"

"There is just this of it, Chick. The very fact that they lost no time in making their attack upon the young ladies proves that they have by no means given up their original purpose of ultimately securing the Congdon fortune for their own."

"That goes without saying."

"The very fact that they undertook the abduction in the bold way they have done proves that they are not considering us—you and me—in the matter at all."

"Oh, does it?"

"It proves, also, that they have invented a scheme which they believe will fool us as completely as it does others."

Chick laughed aloud at the very absurdity of the idea.

"It is no laughing matter," remonstrated the detective. "It is extremely serious."

"Of course it is serious."

"I refer to what I just said, and not to the case by itself. Have you stopped to analyze what those people have done since three o'clock yesterday afternoon?"

"It has not occurred to me that it requires much analysis."

"That is where you are wrong."

"Tell me what you think about it, Nick."

"I will give you the analysis, Chick."

"Please."

"First, they get themselves admitted to cash bail; we

don't know whether they intend to 'jump' it or not, but it is to be presumed that they do."

"Yes."

"Then they lose no time in making the contemplated assault upon the Congdons. And now, second, they make no effort whatever to cover their tracks."

"That is so, sure enough."

"More than that, they act as if they really desired that we should be well informed about every move they make. They know perfectly well that it will not be long before I find out that the Congdon girls have disappeared. They knew that when I found it out I would at once be 'wise' to every one of their moves; but, instead of attempting to throw me off the track, they make it as easy for me as they can."

"How so?"

"By stripping Madelaine's rooms of her things. By leaving the safe door open, with the key in the lock. *By showing me, in every way that it is possible to do so, that it is their intention that Rose shall again impersonate Madelaine.*"

"Well?"

"And then, as if to clinch their method of preparation, Ironarm himself appears at Muldoon's saloon, without the shadow of a disguise, knowing perfectly well that I will go there; knowing perfectly well that Muldoon will describe him to me, and that I will at once recognize the description."

"By Jove, I hadn't thought about that!"

"I had. I don't know what monkey business they did with Peter as yet; but, whatever they did with him, or to him, it was done more for our benefit than for their own. I mean that it was done as a part of their scheme, whatever it is; I mean that they *intend us to follow them through this matter up to a certain point.*"

"I will confess, Nick, that you are getting altogether too deep for me," said Chick.

"It is too deep for both of us, where we are now—but we'll swim out."

"You bet!"

"Ironarm's two calls at Muldoon's were made with deliberate purpose, and that deliberate purpose was that I should find out everything he did while there—which I have done."

"Yes."

"He went there, in the first place, to give Peter some money, knowing that Peter was such a monstrous ass that he would talk about it."

"Yes."

"He went there the second time to keep Peter out of the way while they removed the articles they desired from the house—and he knew that I would understand that, as well as the other visit."

"Well?"

"Whatever their scheme is, they have made just one mistake about it."

"What is that?"

"They have played in the belief that we can be made to believe that they are fools—and I know a whole lot better than that."

"Again, I don't understand you."

"I believe that they are trying to convince us that they intend deliberately to attempt another impersonation."

"Well, don't you really believe that very thing?"

"Yes; but not in the way they would have me believe it."

"Why?"

"They could not, for example, do as they did before—or, rather, as they attempted to do before; that is, they could not or would not dare to spirit Elsie away and then to install Rose in the place of Madelaine. It would be altogether too thin, and they know that you and I would be onto the game in a holy minute. They have got something up their sleeves behind that."

"But what?"

"I wish I knew. You will have to help me to work out the puzzle, Chick. I will give it to you in the form of a question."

"All right."

"Here it is: How can Rose hope to impersonate Madelaine Congdon and at the same time keep Elsie Congdon on the scene?"

"Do you mean how can she hope to fool Elsie, and, you and me, as well as the rest of the world?"

"Yes; only confine it to Elsie, for the sake of my question."

"I don't believe it can be done at all."

"And yet that is unquestionably the very thing that they are trying to do, or that they have decided to attempt."

"It will fail."

"Of course it will fail. It must fail. But in what manner can they view it by which they can derive any hope of success?"

"Give it up, Nick."

"You are treating the subject lightly, Chick, and I am in serious earnest. It is as true as that you are seated beside me that they rely upon convincing Elsie first, and that they will leave it to her to convince us and others later on."

"I see now what you are getting at."

"Thank goodness!"

"But isn't it utterly preposterous to suppose that they can even hope to impose another woman upon Elsie as her own sister?"

"It certainly is; but that is their game, for it could not be worked in any other way, and they intend to work it."

"Do you suppose that Elsie could be deceived regarding the identity of her own sister?"

"No; but *they* think that she can. The question is, What scheme have they in hand which leads them to feel so cock-sure that it will work?"

"Maybe they are going into the drug business," suggested Chick.

"No; drugs wouldn't do it. They know that we, as well as others, would drop to that at once. Elsie must be in her right mind and in possession of all her senses when she makes the declaration, 'This woman is my sister Madelaine.'"

"Possibly they will get Doctor Quackenbos, the hypnotist, to 'suggest' the idea to Elsie. He professes to raise the dead, and to perform a few other miracles by what he calls 'suggestion.' What do you think of that?"

"I wish you wouldn't joke about this, Chick. It is a question which we must answer before we are through with this case: How can Rose hope to impersonate Madelaine Congdon, and at the same time keep Elsie Congdon in ignorance of it?"

"I'll have to do as I did before, Nick—give it up. I can get only one bit of satisfaction out of your theory."

"And what is that?"

"It is that, if you are correct in your surmises, Elsie stands in no danger whatever."

"That is true enough; but Madelaine does. She is in terrible danger at this very moment. Of that you may rest thoroughly well assured," replied the detective.

CHAPTER VI.

PETER TAKES THE THIRD DEGREE.

They drew up at the house as the detective ceased speaking, and were soon thereafter at the luncheon-table.

"I think," said the detective, as he was leaving it, half an hour later, "that I will leave you three fellows to gun around the city as you please this afternoon, in the hope that one of you will pick up some trace of Ironarm Praxatel, or of one of the women who complete his gang. You can each select your own stamping-ground, and stamp on it to your hearts' content. I have other fish to fry."

He left the house then, and, leaping into his car, was soon at police headquarters, where he found the inspector without delay.

"Did my man show up with the letter, inspector?" he asked.

"Sure! He cried like a baby when he found that I intended to keep him here."

"Did he have anything particular to say?"

"No. Anyhow, I didn't give him a chance to say anything. I sent him below at once."

"Where is he?"

"Down in the sweat-box—the padded cell, you know. I thought that would about fit your requirements, Nick."

"It does."

"Will you have him up here, or will you go down there?"

"I'll have him up here. The sight of your buttons will add to the object-lesson I wish to give him."

"What has he done, anyhow? What have you nailed him for?"

"You will understand that when I question him, inspector. It is, in fact, that Congdon affair over again. Praxatel and his three women associates were liberated on cash bail yesterday, and they lost no time in sailing into the Congdons again. This time they have abducted the whole bunch."

"What do you mean by the whole bunch?"

"Both the Congdon sisters, their maid, and Mrs. Belknap, who acted as chaperon for the young ladies."

The inspector whistled.

"Who is this fellow we have got down-stairs?" he asked.

"The Congdons' coachman."

"What did he have to do with it?"

"I don't know yet. That is what I wish to find out."

"When did the abduction happen?"

"Yesterday afternoon, about four o'clock."

"What! In daylight? In the city?"

"So it would seem."

"The thing is impossible, Nick!"

"It seems, nevertheless, to be an established fact. The four went out together in the victoria to do some shopping. They left home about three. The coachman says they drove to Altman's store. Nothing has been seen or heard of them since."

"Humph!"

"That is what I have remarked several times already, but it doesn't seem to do any good. At half-past eleven o'clock last night that woman who calls herself Rose appeared at the house, and succeeded in getting past the new butler and into Madelaine's rooms. This morning at half-past seven she lit out again, after helping herself to all she required of Miss Congdon's things."

"It beats the devil, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does. Will you have that fellow up for me now, please?"

The inspector rang the bell, gave the required order, and a few minutes later the coachman, Peter, was led, bathed in tears, into the private office of the inspector.

The door was closed. Orders were given that they were not to be disturbed again until it should be opened, and then the process which is generally known as the "third degree" was begun.

The detective conducted the ceremonies. The inspector looked on, with a deep frown upon his brows and a savage look in his eyes, although, as a matter of

fact, he would have given much to laugh, so abject was the attitude of the dejected prisoner.

But Nick began with him smilingly.

"Well, Peter," he said, "you did me the favor to arrest yourself, didn't you?"

"How could I help it, sir? And you sent me here, and told me to bring back the answer."

"Oh, well, you needn't mind that. I have come after the answer, and that will be as well."

"But there wasn't any answer, sir!" blubbered the coachman.

"Oh, yes, there was. You had it with you all the time. You had it on the end of your tongue at the time I gave you the letter to bring down here, only I was afraid that you would not tell me the exact truth up there. I thought you might decide to do so here."

"What have I done, sir? What have I done?"

"Well, for one thing, you have lied to me."

"I didn't, sir! I told you the truth. I did, so help me!"

"In that case, we will say that you did not tell me *all* the truth. For instance, you did not tell me about the red-headed man whom you met around at Muldoon's, and who gave you the money."

If it was possible for Peter to become any whiter than he already was, he did so then.

"How much was it that he gave you, Peter?" continued the detective softly. "Was it one hundred, or was it more than that? And did he give you any more when he went around to see you the second time, after you had waited for him?"

Suddenly Peter assumed a different air altogether. He became pitiably defiant, and replied to the detective:

"I don't know what you are talking about at all."

"Oh, yes, you do. How much money did he give you, Peter?"

"Are you going to make me give it up when you find out?"

"Certainly not. You may keep it; only I wish to know all about it."

The man visibly brightened under this assurance.

"He gave me seventy-five dollars the first time," he said.

"And how much the second time?"

"Twenty-five more."

"How did it happen that he did not give it all to you at once?"

"He didn't have the amount with him. He told me that if I would wait there for him he would bring me the other twenty-five—and he did. He was on the square, all right."

"What did you do to earn that money, Peter?" asked the detective, in a tone so soft that one would have thought he was addressing an invalid.

"I won't tell you. I promised that I wouldn't tell, and I won't."

The detective turned to the inspector.

"I regret, inspector," he said, "that we will have to adopt some harsh measures with this man. I thought he would be reasonable, but——"

He paused significantly, while the inspector slowly rose from his chair.

"It is hardly in accordance with the law, Mr. Carter," he said, in a tone so sympathetic and with such a sorrowful glance at the prisoner that Peter brushed another tear from his eyes. "Still, if you think it is necessary——"

"It is, unless he will reply to my questions. We need not hurt him very much. I think he will talk before he becomes too weak to do so. But if he doesn't——"

Those significant pauses were more terrible than whole sentences of words could have been, and already Peter was visibly trembling. Still, he did not offer to speak.

The inspector crossed the room and opened a cupboard.

"Perhaps, Mr. Carter," he said, "it would be as well to give him one more chance. I dislike to subject any man to this awful cruelty—particularly a fellow as well built and as good-looking as the prisoner—unless it is absolutely necessary."

"Oh, well. Very well. I will try him once more. *Peter!*"

The name was uttered sharply and clearly, and so suddenly that Peter almost jumped out of his chair.

"Yes, sir," he replied weakly.

"What did you do to earn that money from the red-headed man?"

The question was delivered sternly and unrelentingly this time. The words were incisive, and clear, and cold.

"I drove away, sir," he replied, in a voice that was so weak and low that it was almost impossible to hear it.

"Drove away from where?"

"From in front of Altman's, sir."

"How soon was that after the ladies had left the victoria?"

"Not more than ten minutes, sir."

"Who asked you to drive away from in front of the store?"

"A lady, sir. A very beautiful lady she was, too."

"Tell me what she said to you?"

"She came up to the curb where I was standing, sir, and she poked a ten-dollar bill under my nose, and she said to me:

"'Coachman, you may take this if you want it; and if, after you have taken it, you will drive around the corner into Eighteenth Street, I will give you another one just like it.'

"She turned away then, sir, without another word, and I sat as still as death for a long time—mebby five min-

utes, sir. Then I whips up the horses and I drives around the corner, as she had asked."

"And was she there waiting for you?"

"She came up a minute later, sir, with the red-headed man you have been talking about, and the two of them comes to the victoria, and the lady she climbs into it, just as if she owned it, and without so much as saying another word to me. But the man, he comes up close alongside of me, and he does the talking."

"What did he say?"

"He said to me, 'Coachman, if you will drive this lady around the city, anywhere, until half-past six o'clock'—he gave me that other ten-dollar bill right then, sir—'and will then bring her back here, I will meet you anywhere you say to-night and give you a hundred dollars. Will you do it?'

"'I'll get the sack,' says I.

"'Not at all,' says he. 'You can make any excuse you please. You can say that one of the horses cast a shoe, and that you went to have it fixed, not thinking it would take so long. You can say what you please; but, if you wish to earn that hundred dollars, tell me where to meet you to-night, and I will bring it to you.'

"'But what is to become of my ladies, sir?' I asked him; and then he laughed, and he said:

"'I will take good care of them. Miss Congdon is a friend of ours, and we are playing a little practical joke on her and her sister. We have a surprise-party at our house to-night, and we wish them to be present. You will get this evening and to-morrow forenoon off duty, for they will not be home till after lunch to-morrow'—which is to-day, sir."

"Yes. I know."

"Well, sir, I told him about Muldoon's place, and asked him to meet me there, and that is the whole story, as I'm a living man! Only that he asked me not to tell about it."

"And then you drove away with the lady?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you take her?"

"Down Broadway to the City Hall, sir, and back again, walking the horses all the way."

"And then did you return her to Altman's?"

"No, sir. She got out in front of the St. Denis Hotel and walked away, without as much as saying good night. After that I drove back to Altman's, but the place was closed, and I went home, after payin' a feller the whole twenty to clear a long-standin' debt, since I was to have plenty more of the long green soon. You know the rest, sir."

CHAPTER VII.

THE TELEPHONE MESSAGE.

"Inspector," said the detective, turning to that official, "what do you think we ought to do with this fellow?"

The inspector pursed his lips and wrinkled his brows, as if the question were one that puzzled him mightily; and all the while Peter watched him, with anxiety expressed in every feature.

"I'm sure I don't know, Mr. Carter," he replied, at last. "You may do with him as you like. I wash my hands of him. I'll send him up the river for you, if you say so, however."

"Oh, please don't do that, Mr. Inspector!" exclaimed Peter. "I didn't mean to do any harm. I was just a common fool, that was all. If you will let me off this time, it will be a lesson to me, I promise you!"

"I'll tell you what I will do," said Nick. "I'll not only let you off, but I'll send you back to your duty at the stable, with nobody the wiser for what you have done, if you will promise to do and to act exactly as I direct."

"I'll do that, sir! I will! I will!"

"Then listen to me, Peter."

"Yes, sir."

"If you return to work at the stable, it won't be long, I think, before our red-headed friend, or somebody sent by him, shows up there."

"To see me, you mean?"

"Yes. To see you."

"But what could he want of me now, sir?"

"He will have some other work of some kind that he will want you to do for him."

"Well, then, I won't do it. I'll tell him to go——"

"Oh, yes, you will do it. That is precisely what I want to send you back for, because I wish you to be there when he comes."

"I am afraid that I don't understand you, sir."

"I will try and see if I can make you understand."

"Yes, sir."

"Suppose you go back to your stable now; suppose that this evening, or to-morrow morning, or the day after to-morrow, the red-headed man should suddenly appear—or somebody should call to see you who said that he came from the red-headed man; eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"I would want you to be glad to see him. I would want you to act toward him just as if you had never seen me at all. I would want you to express some indignation because your young ladies had not returned to their home; and, in fact, I would want you to appear perfectly natural, if you could do it."

"I think I could, sir."

"Now, in the first place, Peter, if he does come to see you, he will probably ask you a lot of questions, and those questions I want you to answer. If he asks you if you have ever seen me, or have ever heard of me, you are to say no. If he asks you how things are going along inside the house, you will tell him that everything is all right, as far as you know. If he asks you what the servants are saying about the continued absence of

the two young ladies, you will tell him that one of them came back that same night, and left word with the butler that they would be absent for some time—and that you are glad of it, because it gives you nothing to do. Do you understand the idea?"

"I think I do, sir."

"If he asks you where the young ladies are staying, you will say that you suppose they are in the country with some friends."

"Yes, sir."

"And you will carry out the idea all the way through that nobody is alarmed about them, or disturbed by their absence."

The coachman nodded; he was "catching on" better than Nick had dared to hope he would.

"He is sure to question you about me," continued the detective. "He will ask you if I have been to the house, or if strangers have been there at all. In short, he will pump you for all you are worth; but, if you stick to the line of talk that I have already given you, you will be all right."

"I'll do it, sir—I'll do it, sir!"

"After he has finished questioning you, he will probably want you to do something for him, and will offer to pay you for the service. If he does that, I want you to agree to do whatever he asks you to do, and also to accept whatever he chooses to pay you."

"I can do that, sir."

"Yes; I haven't a doubt of it."

"I will do it, too."

"The moment he is gone—the moment he leaves you—I want you to go into the house and tell Harrison, the butler, everything that has been said between you—*everything*. And particularly, if the man should ask you to meet him anywhere, you are to tell Harrison about it; you are to tell him where you are to meet the man, and at what time. Now, that is all you will have to do. Do you think you are equal to it?"

"I do, sir."

"I can promise you that if you carry out my instructions to the letter, without falling short of them, or exceeding them, you will not lose your place. In fact, if you do your part, and do it well, there will be something extra for you when it is done."

"Thank you, sir."

"You may go now; and, when you get home, you are to go directly to Harrison and tell him of everything that has happened to you. Tell him the whole story, from beginning to end."

"He'll—— I don't know what he won't do to me if I do that, sir."

The detective drew a sheet of paper toward him, and wrote upon it:

"HARRISON: I want you to listen patiently to all that Peter has to tell you. You are not to be severe with him. He will tell you about the instructions I have given him. I want you to see to it that he carries them out, and I wish you to give him all the assistance in your power. I also desire that you will call me on the telephone the moment you have any information of any kind to impart to me."

He signed it, and then passed it to Peter to read.

"That will protect you from the wrath of Harrison," he said. "You are to give this to him the moment you arrive. Now, go."

"May I ask a question, sir?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Has any harm come to the young ladies?"

"I don't know, Peter. I can only hope not."

"I would give my life for either of them, sir!"

"I don't doubt it, Peter; but it is up to you to prove it now," was the reply.

After he had gone, the inspector returned to his desk and lighted a cigar.

"You have a wonderful way with men, Nick," he said meditatively. "I should have begun by breaking that fool's jaw, and possibly an arm or two. Then I would have chucked him into a cell, and fed him on bread and water for a week or two; but you—well, you transform him into a sort of detective, and fetch him around so that I honestly believe that he would be willing to stand up and bleed for you at this very moment."

"I haven't a doubt of it, inspector. But do you know why I can do that with men?"

"No; I'm blessed if I do!"

"I will tell you."

"I wish you would."

"It is because I make it a rule of my life always to look for the *good* there is in a man, and to forget the *bad*, just as far as it is possible to do so. Every man has some good in him somewhere, and I have always found that, the worse a man is, the more he appreciates it if you search out and find those spots of good that are in his make-up. He may growl about it, and curse you for doing it, but he likes it, just the same, and he will not forget it; and, if ever you come in contact with that fellow again, he will recall it, and he will do you a good turn, if he can. Try it the next time you put a prisoner through the third degree. Try and discover a spot of good in him, and, if you find it, turn it over for his inspection."

"Humph! Maybe I will."

"It won't hurt you any, and it will do the prisoner good."

The detective left his chair, and also lighted a cigar. Then he laughed, and said:

"That is quite a sermon, isn't it?"

"Yes, Nick; but the text is all right. I shouldn't wonder if there would be more reforms among the crim-

inals if our prisons and jails were run on that principle. Are you going?"

"Yes."

"What are you proposing to do about finding the young ladies?"

"I don't know—just at present. The case is a sort of a blind lead, as a miner would call it."

"Tell me something about that chap Praxatel, Nick."

"There isn't much to tell about him—that is, not much that I know. I arrested him once, in Paris, about fifteen years ago, when we had a rather lively set-to before it was over."

"Who and what is he?"

"He's a French crook of the first water. He's a French Jew, as a matter of fact, with a strain of English or Irish in him somewhere. He has been everything, from a pickpocket to a bank burglar, and from a confidence man to a high-class forger. In France he is known as Bras de Fer; in English, that would be Ironarm."

"He is a forger, too, eh, among other accomplishments?" asked the inspector.

"Yes. I have heard that he is very clever at it, too. He's an implacable scoundrel, and adept at disguises; fearless, relentless, and as smart as lightning."

"And what is this game that he is up to now?"

"It is the game of substitution," replied the detective dryly.

"Eh? What is that?"

"They are trying to substitute the woman Rose for Madelaine Congdon. How they mean to do it I don't know, but that they do intend to make a determined effort in that direction I haven't a doubt."

"But they know that you are onto the game."

"Of course they do. That is what puzzles me. I was discussing it with Chick a little while ago, and it is exactly at that point where I fall flat in all my theories."

"How so?"

"It is evidently their game to fool the younger sister, Elsie, first, and then to rely upon her to convince us. But how in the world they expect to deceive her is more than I can even attempt to guess."

"Well, Nick, catch your man and bring him here. We will put him through the third degree for you."

The detective laughed outright.

"The third degree wouldn't work with that fellow," he said. "He would only sit here and laugh at you. He is about a thousand per cent. too smart for any such trick as that."

"I am rather interested in the case, Nick. I wish you would keep me posted about it, will you?"

"Certainly—if the opportunity offers. But just now I am all in the dark. I don't know which way to turn. If this were a gang of American crooks, I would have some sort of an idea where to look for them, but, as it is, I haven't one."

"I wish I could—— Wait a minute till I answer that telephone. Somebody is ringing me up."

The detective strolled to the window while the inspector replied to the telephone ring; but a moment later the inspector called to him.

"Nick," he said, "one of the crew of your yacht, the *Nadja*, is at your house, and he has reported that the *Nadja* has disappeared from her berth. He wants to see you about it; and Joseph thinks——"

But Nick Carter was already hastening through the corridor toward the street.

CHAPTER VIII.

IRONARM MAKES A BOLD MOVE.

The *Nadja* had been lying for the last week or ten days at one of the piers at Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, and, according to the detective's orders, she had been kept ready to cruise at any moment. That is, her fires were banked, and it was only necessary to rake them out and give her the drafts in order to get up a good head of steam in a few moments.

He had instructed his captain to remain there, where he was, until further orders, and the fact alone that the *Nadja* had left her berth was significant.

The detective knew of the natural bent which Ironarm had for the sea, and for all sea-going craft, and, therefore, the instant when the inspector made the announcement he did, it occurred to the detective that the French crook might have stolen the yacht.

He was not long in reaching his own house, and there he found the sailor awaiting him.

"What brings you here, Tom?" he asked.

"Well, sir," was the reply, "I thought that, seeing as how the *Nadja* had left her berth, and none of us knowed where she'd gone to, it would be as well for us to come here for further orders, sir."

"*Further* orders? What do you mean by that, Tom?"

"Five of us came ashore, sir, according to orders, and——"

"Whose orders? What are you talking about?"

"Your orders, sir."

"I have sent no orders to the yacht, or to anybody aboard of her."

"The captain got your letter, sir. It was delivered by a messenger boy. One of them little fellers in brass buttons, that runs——"

"Yes. I know. When was that?"

"Six bells, sir. Just afore mess-time."

"Eleven o'clock this morning, eh?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Do you know what was in the letter, Tom?"

"I only know that the captain went ashore at once,

sir, and went somewhere to meet you; leastwise, that was what he said. And he detailed five of us to report at Latimer's Stores, and ordered us to wait for you there. I think that you and the captain were to come there together."

"Go on," said Nick.

"Well, sir, we went there, and we waited until half-past two o'clock, and then I made bold to come here, sir, seeing as how you hadn't showed up, and smelling a mice in the hold, so to speak, sir. Leastwise, it didn't look to me as if everything was shipshape, and I just made up my mind that I'd make good and sure.

"But you see, sir, when I left the others I wasn't dead sure that I was doing right, and so I veered off my course a little and set sail for the *Nadja*, thinking as how I'd make sure about it."

"And the *Nadja* was gone, eh?"

"Clean gone, sir."

"Who was aboard of her when you left her?"

"The engineer, the cook, the steward, and the stokers, and two men before the mast, sir."

The detective turned to his assistant, who had entered the room a moment before.

"It's as plain as day, Chick," he said, "that our friend Ironarm has stolen the *Nadja*, and it is also as plain as day that the act is some definite part of the scheme of theirs which puzzles me so greatly."

"I guess there is no doubt of that," replied the assistant.

"I'd give a good deal to see the captain, or to hear from him about now," murmured the detective; and if, as in reply to his wish, the door opened and Joseph appeared on the threshold with a letter in his hand.

"A messenger just brought it, sir," he said.

The detective received it, and tore it open. Then he read the following note from the captain of his yacht:

"Although it is unusual, to say the least, for you to send orders to me in exactly this manner, I know your handwriting so well, and your signature as well, that I can do nothing else than obey to the letter, exactly as you direct me to do. The gentleman—Mr. Praxatel—assures me that it is all right, and he seems to be a very nice sort of a man, and, of course, the very fact that the Misses Congdon are with him reassures me.

"I regret, however, that I am short-handed, having sent Tom and four of the men ashore, according to your orders; but, as you direct me to secure others in their places for this trip, and as Mr. Praxatel tells me that he knows exactly where I can find them, I suppose it is all right. Yours, etc., etc."

That was all.

"Well!" exclaimed the detective, with a grim smile on his face. "What do you think of *that?*"

"It looks very much as if Ironarm had stolen a decided march on us," replied Chick.

"I should say so."

"Was I right? Is there something wrong?" asked the sailor.

"Decidedly so, Tom. Look here, Tom."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"You remember Mr. Simmons, don't you?"

"Aye, aye, sir. Certainly I do. And a finer——"

"His yacht is lying at the foot of Twenty-first Street right now, and he is aboard of her, I am sure. I want you to get down there as fast as you can. Get into the automobile at the door, and tell Bob to drive you there as quickly as possible. When you get there, tell Mr. Simmons that I want him to take me on a short cruise, which probably won't last more than a night and a day, if it does that long—and tell him that Chick and I will follow you in half an hour."

"What are you going to do?" asked Chick, as soon as the sailor was gone. "You don't suppose that Simmons' yacht can catch the *Nadja*, do you?"

"She can follow her," replied the detective grimly.

"But how are you going to trace her course?"

"Everybody knows the *Nadja*. We will have no trouble in ascertaining which way she went; and I have an idea that she won't go far."

"How so? What do you mean?"

"I think that I am at last 'wise' to the scheme," replied the detective.

"What is it, then?"

"I think, for one thing, that they intend us to catch them."

"What in the world——"

"I think that is part of their plot."

"Well, I don't."

"Wait a moment. Look at the thing as it is."

"Well?"

"It isn't an hour since I was talking with the inspector down at headquarters about the man Praxatel, or Ironarm. I spoke of his being a forger, and a very clever one. Now, see what he has done."

"Why, he has forged a letter in your name, and with it he has taken possession of your yacht; but how you work out of that fact the idea that he intends you to chase and catch him, or why he should do so, is more than I can see."

"Didn't he make use of his own name in the forged letter? Or, at least, of the name which we will call his own for the present?"

"Yes."

"Hasn't he made it perfectly plain to the captain who he is?"

"Yes."

"Are not we to conclude, from the captain's letter, that Madelaine and Elsie are with him at this moment?"

"Yes."

"And hasn't he deliberately given the captain an opportunity to send a letter to me?"

"Evidently."

"Well, isn't that proof positive that he *wants* us to pursue him?"

"I don't exactly see it that way, but possibly it is."

"Why don't you see it in that way?"

"I will reply to your question by asking another?"

"Well?"

"If he *does* want us to pursue and capture him—if he has laid his plans in that way, and with that purpose in view—why did he send five of your men ashore and substitute others in their places? Tell me that."

The detective smiled indulgently.

"He has two very good reasons for doing that," he replied.

"Maybe you will tell me what they were—and are," said Chick.

"Certainly. The first, and most important one, was that he wished to have men enough of his own aboard the yacht to control the situation, if it should become vitally necessary that he should do so."

"That is all right. What is the second one?"

"He wants those men with him to give him the appearance of greater strength, and, therefore, to add to the weight of his argument when the time comes for him to convince us that the woman Rose is Madelaine Congdon."

Chick grunted.

"You are altogether too deep for me," he said.

"Listen, Chick."

"Oh, I'm listening, all right."

"If I am right at all in this matter—and I begin to believe thoroughly that I am—the woman Rose is at this moment posing as Madelaine, and Elsie knows it. Madelaine is a prisoner, and she is probably kept under the influence of a drug. We will say that she has been carried aboard the *Nadja*, in the guise of an invalid, and that her supposed condition has been one of the arguments which Ironarm has used in order to convince my captain of the authenticity of the forged letter."

"But how is Elsie governed by those——"

"She is governed by *fear*, Chick. She has been told that they are both in the power of the conspirators, and that, if she says one word to betray the situation, Madelaine will be put to death. She is keeping silent to save her sister, mark my word for it."

"That sounds plausible enough; the part of your argument that does not is the finish of it. How are they going to make Elsie believe, in the end, that Rose is Madelaine?"

"I don't know. I wish I did; but that they have a method, and a good one, you may be sure."

The assistant shook his head, unconvinced.

"Elsie isn't a fool," he said. "She has impressed me as being an unusually smart and brave girl. She knows those people thoroughly; the fates know that she ought to; and she is not going to be hoodwinked so easily by them as you seem to think."

"Chick, it is because of that very fact that they rely upon her to carry out the plot for them. I told you in the beginning that the woman Vera was at the bottom of this. She is equal to almost anything, especially if it is in the line of devilish ingenuity."

"Even so, she cannot make Elsie believe that black is white, or that Rose is her sister Madelaine," insisted Chick.

"We'll see; we will see," said the detective. "Now, get up-stairs and make an arsenal of yourself. The auto will be back here in a few moments, and we will lose no time."

"What about Patsy and Ten-Ichi?" asked Chick.

"We will have to leave them behind, unless they show up in the next five minutes."

Chick left the room, and, as he did so, the front door opened and Patsy and Ten-Ichi came into the house together.

"You are just in time!" called the detective to them. "We leave the house in five minutes."

CHAPTER IX.

A CHASE OVER THE WATER.

Patsy and Ten-Ichi had, of course, returned without either having obtained any clue to work upon in the pursuit of Praxatel of the iron arm. In fact, the detective had not hoped that they could discover one when he sent them out before going down to headquarters himself.

In a few words, he related to them all that had happened, and half an hour later they were all four standing on the deck of Simmons' yacht, with its owner, as she backed into the river and turned her prow toward the wharf where the Nadja had been moored earlier in the day.

Twice Nick signaled to passing yachts, asking if anything had been seen of the *Nadja*, and with the second attempt he received a reply to the effect that she had passed through Hell Gate an hour earlier, bound easterly.

Their own craft was, accordingly, turned into the East River, and in the course of time they also entered the Sound through the narrow channel; and here they received further intelligence, but only to the effect that she had been sighted, still bound easterly.

"I wonder if this is to be another sea chase?" mused the detective aloud, just as darkness was falling; and Simmons, hearing him, replied:

"It doesn't make the slightest difference to me, Nick.

We are prepared for a long voyage, if you want to take one, old man."

"I don't want to take one. That is just the point—and I don't much believe we will be forced to do so, either. I think that the people aboard the *Nadja* are bound for some definite point, where they mean to leave the yacht and send her home."

It was Chick who replied to this statement.

"Then why should they go to all that trouble to take the *Nadja* at all?" he demanded.

"Because they want us to follow them," replied the detective.

"What shall we do, Nick?" asked Simmons. "Do you want to keep on through the Sound, in the dark, or shall we lay by somewhere until morning?"

"We will run in at Larchmont, if you don't mind, Simmons, and wait there until morning," was the reply.

And this they did, finding an anchorage, where they waited for daylight to appear.

But at dawn they were astir again, and were soon once more headed easterly.

Nick was at the breakfast-table in the cabin, when Chick, who had finished his breakfast and gone on deck, returned, and he said quietly:

"We have sighted the *Nadja*, Nick."

"What!" exclaimed the detective, rising hastily.

"She is headed toward us, and we have slowed down to wait for her," continued the assistant. "Simmons is signaling now for her to stop and speak with us."

The detective went on deck at once, and there, sure enough, less than a mile away and headed directly toward them, was the *Nadja*, while she was flying a reply to Simmons' signal to the effect that she would do as requested.

A few moments later the yachts were abreast of each other, and at Nick's request a boat was lowered, and he was sent, alone, aboard his own yacht.

The captain stood at the rail to receive him, and Nick noticed that there were some strange faces among the crew that were regarding him curiously.

He at once led the way into the cabin.

"Now, captain, tell me all about it," he demanded. "How many passengers did you bring up here with you last night?"

"Six," was the reply.

"Where are they now?"

"I left them at Bridgeport."

"When?"

"About ten o'clock last night."

"It didn't take you all that time to get to Bridgeport, did it?"

"No; we had passed there, and had to put back again."

"Why?"

"The young lady who was sick was taken so much worse, sir, that it was considered best that she should be taken ashore."

"What was her name?"

"What, sir! don't you know?"

"Please content yourself with answering questions, and not asking them. What was the name of the young lady who was ill?"

"Miss Rose Danton."

"Who were the others of the party? I mean what were their names—the names they gave to you?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Praxatel, Miss Hawthorne Praxatel, Miss Congdon, and Miss Elsie Congdon."

"Did the party go ashore at once when you made your landing last night?"

"Within an hour—yes, sir."

"Did any of them say where they were going?"

"Yes. To a private sanitarium somewhere above Bridgeport."

"Did you hear the name of it, or the name of the man who conducts it?"

"Carringford's, they called it."

"What was the matter with the woman who was ill?"

"I don't know, sir. Some mental trouble, I think. I was not told."

"Did you talk with any members of the party during your short voyage?"

"Yes; with all of them; only, of course, not with the sick one."

"With Miss Congdon, for example?"

"Yes."

"What did she have to talk about?"

"Just the yacht, and the water, and the scenery, and all that sort of thing, sir."

"And did you talk with Miss Elsie, also?"

"Some. She didn't seem inclined to talk. She seemed to be in trouble. I thought I saw her weeping two or three times, but I was not sure. I spoke about it to Mr. Praxatel, and he explained that she was greatly worried because of the illness of her friend."

"Humph! Did you see the sick woman?"

"Only when she was brought aboard and when she was taken ashore."

"Did you notice any resemblance between her and the elder Miss Congdon?"

"Some; not much. She was very wan and pale. She looked to me as if she was on her last legs, sir—as if she had been sick a month, or a year."

"What did Praxatel have to say to you when you parted?"

"He was very polite. He told me over and over again to thank you for the use of the yacht, and to say how deeply he regretted that he could not take advantage of your offer for a longer cruise."

"Oh! He did, eh? Let me tell you something, captain. Those letters that you received yesterday were

forgeries. Praxatel is the greatest scoundrel unhung, and the women with him are as bad as he is—all save the Congdons, of course. It was Miss Congdon who was ill—and she had been made ill by the administering of some drug. It was Rose Danton who posed as Miss Congdon, and who talked with you about the scenery, and the trouble which made Elsie Congdon weep was the fear that the people with her intended to murder her sister. Hereafter you will accept no written orders without first calling me up on the telephone to discover if they are real."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, get back to Bridgeport as soon as you can. Signal to Simmons to follow us there. I won't wait to return to the other yacht, or to have any of them brought here."

In truth, the detective was not at all sorry to be alone for awhile.

He had never had a case that was quite like this one in any particular.

He was thoroughly satisfied that Ironarm intended to leave a clue behind him, wherever he went; that he intended that the detective should have little or no difficulty in following the trail he left behind him, although it was evident that he meant to keep ahead just as long as the necessities of his plot demanded that he should do so.

But why did he do all this? Why was he so desirous of being pursued?

Ponder as the detective might over the problems presented to him, he could find no satisfactory answers to the questions he asked himself.

At Bridgeport, as he had expected, he had no difficulty whatever in tracing the fugitives.

They had left a broad trail behind them, if the simile may be employed.

Men hanging about the wharf remembered to have seen them land; one of them had even been sent after carriages for the party, and for a consideration he volunteered to find the same drivers again, if they had returned to their homes, or their stations.

And he did find them, without much trouble—two of them, for four of the party had traveled in one hack and two in the other.

Moreover, they were perfectly clear about where they had taken the party.

There had been no concealment about it whatever. They had gone to Carringford's Sanitarium, where the sick woman was to be left in charge of the doctors.

Carringford's, it was explained, was twelve miles back on the hills, and the party, all told, had been left there about half-past two o'clock in the morning.

"Which of you drove the hack that contained the woman who was ill?" asked the detective.

"I, sir," replied one of the men.

"Did you drive ahead of the other hack, or behind it?"

"I arrived at the sanitarium a half-hour ahead of the other hack," he answered.

"And you had not only the sick woman, but also the man of the party, didn't you?"

"I did."

"Tell me exactly what he did, and how he acted when you arrived there."

"Why, he acted just as anybody else would, under the same circumstances. He was evidently expected, for the doctor was waiting up to receive him."

"What did they do? Tell me exactly how the two men—the doctor and your fare—acted when they met," said the detective sharply.

"Well, sir, they said howdy-do, they shook hands, the doctor called two women attendants to carry the young woman who was sick into the house, and then they walked one side, and stood talking together until the other hack got there."

"What happened then?"

"The four women got out of the hack. At least, there were three women and a young lady."

"Yes. And what did they do?"

"They went into the house."

"What house? Aren't there more than one or two houses there?"

"Yes. They went into one of the buildings what we call the cottages."

"And then?"

"Then the man paid us off, and we came away. That's all there is about it."

"Are those horses the same ones that you drove last night?"

"No; they're fresh, all around."

"It is twelve miles there, you say?"

"Thereabouts."

"How quickly could you take four of us there for double rates?"

"In a little more than an hour, I think."

"Try it, then."

Nick shook hands with Simmons, and thanked him for what he had done. Then he ordered his captain to remain where he was with the *Nadja* until further orders, by telegraph or telephone; and then he followed his assistants, who had already climbed into the hack, and they were soon speeding at a rapid gait along the streets of Bridgeport.

"I think," said the detective to his companions, "that we are getting mighty near to the culmination of all this wild-goose chase—and I think I understand, at last, what it is."

"What?" asked Chick. "What do you think it is?"

"I think," replied the detective, "that we will find that Ironarm and Carringford are old acquaintances, and that in this particular affair they are confederates—and I

think we will have no difficulty whatever in finding Elsie now, and that with her we will find a very much invalided-looking person, whom she will firmly believe and assert is her elder sister."

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY OF THE "SCHEME."

A flood of light broke over the assistant at that instant. He started to his feet, and then sank back again upon the cushions.

"I see it all now," he said. "I understand."

"What do you understand?" asked the detective, smiling.

"I understand the game they are playing—the scheme, as you call it."

"Tell me what your understanding of it is. Let us see if we agree."

* * * * * * *

Right here, if the reader will pardon the digression, the narrator of this story will anticipate some of the discoveries which the detectives made later on, and will, for a moment, leave the detective and his three assistants, as they were traveling with all speed toward the sanitarium, and go on ahead of them.

And this digression is a transcript of an experience which came to Elsie Congdon, and which she related afterward to the detective.

But it will be told here in the third person exactly as if we were eye-witnesses of the whole affair.

The two hacks, one of them bearing the unconscious form of Madelaine, in charge of Ironarm the Crook, and the other containing Elsie and the three women of the party, arrived at the sanitarium conducted by Abel Carrington shortly after two o'clock in the morning.

The "doctor"—that is, Carrington himself—was waiting for them at the top of the driveway, and by a gesture he indicated that he wished them to drive past the main building and to the door of one of the cottages.

These cottages, so called, were two-story edifices of eight rooms each, four on each floor, and they were intended for the accommodation of the overflow of patients, or for wealthy patrons, who could afford the expensive rates attached to their occupancy.

The hack which carried the unconscious Madelaine there arrived some time in advance of the other one, so that when Elsie arrived her sister had already been carried inside the cottage and disposed of in some way, she knew not how.

The instant when she got down from the carriage herself, Ironarm stepped forward, and, clasping her by one arm, led her forcibly inside the cottage, at the same time whispering to her:

"Not a word now! I swear to you, Elsie, if you utter one word so that the doctor can hear you, Madelaine shall not live until morning!"

Tremblingly, Elsie obeyed him, and kept silent; and thus she found herself conducted to a large, square room on the ground floor, which she was told would be her sleeping-apartment, which she might occupy alone.

Ironarm left her then, standing in the middle of the floor, but he returned after a moment with a bag containing her things. Then, with a cruel grin, he said:

"I think you will be safe enough here, Mademoiselle Elsie. If you will look at the windows, you will see that they are provided with iron bars. This is the only door to the room, and this I shall lock when I go out. I hope you will sleep well."

Elsie was brave and plucky, but her nerve was pretty nearly gone by now, and she moaned:

"If only I had had the courage to call out to that doctor and tell him the truth!"

"It's mighty lucky for you that you did not," retorted Ironarm. "He wouldn't stand a blooming minute for this game that I am playing; but, even though he would not have believed you if you had called out to him, he would have asked me some ugly and unpleasant questions which I don't care to answer just at present."

Elsie could not know that this very language on the part of her abductor was part of a trap which he was setting for her, and baiting with a nicety that was amazing.

She fell into the trap.

She thought she saw a chance even yet of appealing to the doctor, for Praxatel, or Ironarm, had left the door half ajar, and had advanced into the room toward her while he was talking.

She seized upon the opportunity, as she supposed it to be, and acted.

With one loud and piercing scream, she leaped past Ironarm toward the half-open door, calling out as she did so:

"Doctor! Doctor! Doctor! Help! Help! *Help!*"

But she did not reach the door.

Before she could half do so, Ironarm had seized her, placed one hand over her mouth, and, lifting her bodily from the floor, he threw her upon the bed, and held her there.

Then, with every appearance of the utmost ferocity, he hissed into her ear:

"Stop that! Stop it, I tell you! If you make another break of that kind, I'll choke the life out of you! If you so much as utter another sound, I swear I will give Madelaine a dose that will settle her hash before morning!"

She did not doubt that he meant what he said, and, shuddering, she remained silent.

Then he pointed to the electric light, and, telling her

she could turn it off when she pleased, he went out of the room, and she heard him lock the door after him.

After that she sat upon the edge of the bed for a long time, trembling with fear.

Part of the time she could hear the voices of men conversing outside her windows, although she could distinguish no word they uttered.

Over her head, for awhile, there was the tramp of women's feet, and she had no doubt that one or more of the women who had borne her company from Bridgeport occupied that room—and she shuddered again.

She crossed the room and examined the windows, only to find that Ironarm had told her the truth—that they were provided with strong iron bars.

She went to the door and tried to open it, but it was locked, as she had known it to be.

Then she returned to the bed, and wept.

After a time, thoroughly exhausted, she dropped into a troubled sleep outside the bed, for she had not removed even her hat since entering the room; but suddenly she started wide-awake, under the impression that somebody was outside the door of her room.

In that idea she was not mistaken, for now she plainly heard the sound of the key turning in the lock, and she leaped from the bed in terror, and ran to the opposite side of the room, where she stood, with clasped hands, panting like a startled deer.

Then the door opened, and an apparition appeared on the threshold.

Elsie almost shrieked aloud. It is likely that she would have done so had not the figure in the doorway held up a warning hand, and then placed her fingers against her lips, in token that she desired silence.

"Madelaine!" gasped Elsie; and she darted forward, seizing the tottering figure, in its nightclothing, in her arms and drawing her toward the bed.

Was it Madelaine? Elsie certainly thought so at that moment.

But she looked more like a corpse than like the peerless Madelaine at that moment.

She wore nothing but a night-dress. Her hair, luxuriant in its length, but greatly disheveled now, was steaming down her back. Her feet were bare. Her face was white and drawn, and there were cruel lines of suffering under her eyes. Her eyes were wide and staring. Her entire body trembled with terror.

"Save me! Save me, Elsie!" she breathed gaspingly. "Let us fly from here! Presently one of them will awaken, and then it will be discovered that I have escaped! Oh, what can I do! What can I do! I have no clothing!"

"Madelaine! Madelaine!" cried Elsie, in a subdued voice. "Tell me how you escaped!"

"Hush!" replied the other. "We must not waste time now. Are there clothes in that great bag you have there?"

"I don't know what is in it," replied Elsie. "They packed it for me. I have not looked inside of it."

But already she was on her knees beside the bag, tearing it open with feverish hands.

Fortune seemed to favor them in regard to the contents of the bag.

If it had been packed expressly for the present emergency, it could not have been better equipped, for there they found everything that was required, even to a street-gown.

To be sure, there was no hat, but there was a lace mantilla, which would supply the purpose very well.

Elsie threw these things out upon the floor as rapidly as she discovered them, and her companion seized upon them as eagerly and began at once to array herself in them.

And, while she worked feverishly at dressing, she talked in a low, almost inaudible, tone to Elsie.

"I have not been unconscious any of the time," she confided to her. "I have only pretended that I was so, in order to keep them from giving me so much of that horrible drug. I have listened, and watched, and waited for this opportunity.

"When they brought me in the house—there were two women nurses who did it—they undressed me and put me to bed. Then one of them went away and the other sat down to watch.

"But scarcely was she alone with me before she took a bottle from some place of concealment and began to drink what it contained; and, after awhile, I saw that she was getting drowsy—and it was then, Elsie, that I resolved to escape to-night, if possible.

"I watched her—oh, how I watched her!—and at last I was sure that she was asleep.

"It was then that I arose very quietly and stole on tiptoe from the room, locking the door after me as I came out. Then I came here to you."

"But how did you know how to find me?" asked Elsie. "How did you know where I was?"

"I heard Praxatel telling the others about how you cried out for the doctor, and he described the location of your room then. He told more than that, too, Elsie, for I heard him say that it was a lucky thing for them that the doctor did not hear your cries, for he would have made an investigation at once. Elsie, we will go to him. We will go to that doctor, and we will awaken him and tell him the horrible truth. He will protect us. I know he will, from what Praxatel said about it."

"I am not sure," hesitated Elsie. "I fear that he——"

"But I am sure. It is our only chance, anyway, for how else are we to escape? It is very dark outside. We do not know where we are, I have only these slippers

of yours on my feet. Yes; we will go to the doctor. Come. I am ready now."

"But we do not know where to go. We do not even know the way out."

"The outer door is right here by your own door. I opened it before I opened yours. We will close it behind us and lock it on the outside. Come, dear—come! Turn off the light and come!"

Tremblingly, Elsie did as requested; and then she followed her companion from the room and out upon the starlit world.

The main building of the sanitarium was not far from where they stood. There was a light burning in one of the rooms on the ground floor, and when they peered in through the window Elsie recognized the burly figure of the big doctor.

He was seated at a desk, evidently working over some figures, and Elsie trembled lest by alarming him they should only succeed in getting themselves back again into the terrible situation from which they had only just escaped.

Not so her companion.

She reached forward and tapped forcibly against the window-pane.

Instantly the doctor started to his feet. He hurried toward the window. He peered out upon them through the glass.

In a sort of haze, Elsie saw him fumbling at the fastenings, and then, before she was aware of it, they were standing in the room before him, and her companion was telling him, in feverish words, the story of the night.

"It is incredible! *Incredible!*" Elsie heard him exclaim; and then he addressed her.

"Miss Elsie," he demanded, "is this the truth that I have just heard? Is this your sister—is this your sister Madelaine?"

"Yes—oh, yes!" cried Elsie. "This is Madelaine. She just escaped. She came to me in her nightclothes. She is dressed now in my things. This is Madelaine! This is my sister! The other—the one who is dressed in my sister's clothes, and who bore her name, is Rose Danton—the woman you thought was ill. This is my sister Madelaine; and oh, doctor, save us! Save us!"

"Of course I'll save you!" was the doctor's instant reply.

CHAPTER XI.

STABBED WITH A SCARF-PIN.

Doctor Carringford drew forward two easy chairs, in which he half forced the young women to be seated.

His next act was to prepare a dose of medicine, in separate glasses, for each of them, which he commanded them to drink, with a kindly and fatherly air.

"Now compose yourselves," he said to them, "and have no fear. I will soon set your matters straight for you."

Elsie saw him go to the telephone, which was on a stand near his desk. She saw him lift the receiver from the hook, and she heard him call central, and ask that he be at once connected with the police headquarters in Bridgeport; and after that she listened for a considerable time to a one-sided argument, after which he replaced the telephone, and exclaimed:

"Isn't it annoying? Those Bridgeport police will not come out here. They claim that they have no jurisdiction. I will have to take the matter into my own hands."

He rang a large bell that was on his desk sharply. Then he started for the door which opened into the hall, just as it was opened from the other side, and Ironarm appeared in the opening.

"So!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "This is where I find you, is it?"

He started to advance across the floor toward the two young women, but the big doctor barred his way, and in the meantime several of the attendants appeared upon the scene from the hallway.

"Stand back!" exclaimed the doctor. "Your villainy is found out! That woman whom you attempted to pass off on me as Madelaine Congdon is named Rose Danton, and this young woman, whom you said was ill, and whom you represented to be Rose Danton, is Madelaine Congdon."

"You lie!" cried Ironarm, and he struck out wildly at the doctor.

They grappled; they rolled over together on the floor; the attendants of the institution rushed to the aid of the doctor, and in a few moments Ironarm was bound firmly and carried from the room, to be deposited in one of the doctor's padded cells.

Somewhat torn and disheveled, and looking a little the worse for his short struggle, the doctor then called two of his female nurses, and had the young women taken to adjoining rooms, where he told them they could rest in perfect security.

Elsie swallowed one more dose of the doctor's medicine before she retired, and after that she knew no more until she was awakened and told that Nick Carter, the detective, was down-stairs in the office, waiting to see her.

She arose then, with alacrity, and she dressed herself with all possible speed.

Before she descended the stairs she passed into the adjoining room, to look upon the face of her sister.

But Madelaine(?) was apparently sleeping soundly.

She was also breathing heavily, with her face half buried in the bedclothing; and Elsie tiptoed out of the room again.

It was not yet ten o'clock in the morning when the detective and his assistants arrived at the sanitarium, and, although Doctor Carringford had not been in bed all night, he was up and about, and apparently waiting for them.

In some mysterious manner, known only to himself, he seemed to have expected their arrival; at least, that was the impression the detective received.

Nick thought it best to strike directly at the root of the matter first, and so, the moment he met the doctor, he said to him:

"You are Doctor Carringford, are you not? I am Nick Carter, from New York. I am armed with a warrant for the arrest of one Bras de Fer, alias Ironarm, alias Herman Praxatel, for abduction and robbery; also for the arrest of Rose Danton, Vera Verona, alias Praxatel, and Hawthorne Praxatel, for the same offenses. I am informed that the parties are all here, sir."

The doctor put out his hand deprecatingly, after the manner of a Chatham Street clothier.

"Two of the people you name are here," he replied, "and are already under arrest—that is to say, they are under restraint. I do not know that I had any right to restrain them, sir; but when the knowledge of what they had done, and were doing, came to me, I made bold to take the law into my own hands. I had already telephoned for the Bridgeport police, but they assured me that they had no jurisdiction in the matter, and refused to come to my aid, and so I was compelled——"

Nick made a gesture for silence. He did not know how long the doctor would continue to talk if he were not stopped.

"Who are here, and who escaped?" he demanded.

"The man who calls himself Praxatel attacked me in my office last night—or, rather, early this morning, for it was getting along toward daylight——"

"Please get down to facts, and answer my question, doctor."

"The man Praxatel and the woman whom you call Hawthorne Praxatel are here. The other two women, Vera Verona, who I understand is Mrs. Praxatel, and Rose Danton, have eluded me."

"What have you to tell me about the young ladies whom they brought here with them?"

"Ah, sir, that is a remarkable story. I was entirely deceived. The man had telephoned out here that they were coming. He had already written to me from New York. His claim was that he had a patient named Rose Danton, who was a victim of the morphine habit. He wished to place her in my care, and, if I do say it, I keep the best——"

"Stick to facts, if you please."

"When the party arrived, I was waiting for them. Miss Danton—as I supposed her to be—was immediately placed in charge of two of my nurses and taken to a room, where she was undressed and put to bed. The other young lady was conducted to a room on the ground floor of the cottage, where—I discovered later—the man locked her in.

"But it seems, sir, that the young lady whom I supposed to be Miss Danton was not Miss Danton at all, but was, in reality, Miss Congdon, while she whom I supposed to be Miss Congdon was, in reality, Miss Rose Danton, masquerading the part.

"Miss Congdon had been drugged, as they all supposed, into unconsciousness; but, as it turned out, she was playing possum, and was only watching for an opportunity to escape.

"It came during the night, when the nurse who was watching with her fell asleep. Then it was that Miss Congdon, weak and faint and in her night-dress, rose silently from the bed and stole down-stairs, where she succeeded in discovering the room occupied by her sister. The key of the door was, fortunately, in the lock. She opened it and entered. There were explanations between the sisters. Miss Elsie fortunately had clothing in her bag, in which her sister dressed herself. Then at once they came here to this office, where, quite fortunately, I was still engaged in working over my books. They tapped at the window, and I at once went to them and admitted them to this room. I heard their story. Miss Elsie assured me that the young woman whom I had supposed to be Miss Danton was, in reality, her sister, and, convinced that a great wrong was being done, I at once sought the aid of the police, as I have already explained. When I found that the police would not come, I resolved to take matters into my own hands, and at once rang the bell for my attendants. It was at that moment when the man Praxatel burst into the room and attacked me. Fortunately, with the aid of my attendants, I was enabled to overpower him, and as soon as that was

done we hastened to the cottage to apprehend the others of the party, but only to find that two of them had already escaped. We succeeded, however, in apprehending——"

"For Heaven's sake, stop!" exclaimed the detective. "You'll injure yourself if you go on in that way, doctor."

"You see, sir, I am still greatly excited over the untoward occur——"

"Yes; I see. Where are the young ladies who you so *fortunately* rescued?" asked the detective dryly.

"They occupy adjoining rooms here in this building. I will have them called at once, if you desire it."

"Yes. Do so at once, if you please."

The order was given, and after a little the nurse who had taken it returned, to say that she thought it best not to rouse the elder sister, but that Miss Elsie would be down immediately.

While they were waiting for Elsie's appearance, Nick strolled aside, with Chick, and when they were beyond the doctor's hearing he said to his assistant:

"Do you understand the game now, Chick?"

"Sure thing!"

"Do you see how deftly they arranged it to fool Elsie, and, through her, to fool us, as well, my lad?"

"It's as plain as day."

"Madelaine was carried into that cottage, *and straight through it and out at the other side*, and from there she was either taken away from the place at once in a conveyance that was awaiting her, or she is still confined somewhere around this place. Possibly in one of the wards for the insane."

"That's my idea, Nick."

"Then Rose, posing as Madelaine, entered the house, and went to the room that had been prepared for the 'invalid.' She undressed and went to bed, and waited. She first fixed her face and eyes and her general appearance so that she would look exactly as Madelaine looked when they carried her into the house. At the proper moment she descended the stairs and entered the room occupied by Elsie, and she so played her part that she was enabled to deceive the sister."

"And this doctor is as great a scoundrel as Ironarm!"

"Every whit."

"What are you going to do now?"

"First, I will hear what Elsie has to tell us. After that I will decide."

When Elsie did appear in the office, Nick took her aside at once, and, when the doctor attempted to follow them, he curtly ordered him to remain where he was.

But Elsie's story, as related to the detective, was exactly as we have already heard it, and she was so certain that the young woman with whom she had fled from the cottage was her sister that for a moment the detective was puzzled.

But he *knew* that it could not be so.

Things had worked altogether too smoothly and easily for that.

He assured Elsie that she had been deceived; that the woman up-stairs was Rose, and not Madelaine; that it was all a part of the plot against them and their fortune.

But Elsie would not have it so. She was certain in her own mind that it was Madelaine with whom she had fled from the cottage; and, when every argument that Nick could advance to convince her of her error failed, he said grimly:

"Come with me, then, and I will prove it to you."

"What do you intend to do?" asked Elsie, alarmed.

"I wish you to take me directly to the room occupied by your supposed sister."

"But, Mr. Carter——"

"If you do not conduct me there, I will go without you," he said sternly. "We cannot afford to dally now, Elsie. Come!"

They returned to the office, and there Nick motioned for his assistants to follow him; and so they all ascended the stairs, followed by Doctor Carringford, who was smiling slyly—a fact which did not escape the notice of the detective.

They entered the room where the supposed Madelaine was lying, apparently in a stupor; and, while Nick restrained Elsie from rushing forward, and while Patsy and Ten-Ichi guarded the door against the doctor's escape, Nick advanced to the bedside of the seemingly unconscious woman.

Nick Carter was so positive of his premises that he did not even take the trouble to examine the features of the woman in the bed; but, having removed his stick-pin from his tie, he coolly jabbed it deep into the fleshy part of the woman's arm.

Instantly there was a shriek of agony, and it was followed—strangely enough—by a torrent of selected French oaths, and of choice abuse in the French language, for the detective followed that first stab with the

pin by a second and a third one, all delivered in quick succession—and there is, perhaps, nothing which is so trying to the temper as a jab with a pin.

The woman on the bed leaped from it to the floor, where she stood, glaring furiously at the detective. And then, with a scream of rage, she plucked a dagger from the bosom of her night-robe, and hurled it at Nick Carter's throat.

CHAPTER XII.

A MADWOMAN'S LEAP.

The scene which immediately followed upon this act of the detective's beggars description.

Everything seemed to happen at once.

The dagger which Rose Danton hurled at the detective he dodged, and it flew over his shoulder, past his throat, almost grazing it, and buried its point in the window-casing, where it remained vibrating ominously.

And she followed up the attack by another, not less dangerous.

She had been thoroughly prepared for that moment, for the instant the dagger left her hand she leaped toward the bed again, and, thrusting her hand under one of the pillows, drew forth a revolver, which she was in the act of using when the detective tore it from her grasp and snapped a pair of handcuffs on her wrists.

But other things had been happening at the same time.

At the very instant when Nick Carter jabbed the pin into the woman's arm the first time, Doctor Carringford dropped to the fact that the game was up.

He started for the door, to escape from the room, but Patsy and Ten-Ichi barred his way. Chick was, unfortunately, at the opposite side of the room, near the window.

It has been said that the doctor was a ponderous man, big and burly; but nobody guessed that he possessed the strength that was really his.

Agile and strong as the two younger assistants are, Carringford brushed them aside as if they were flies, lifting Patsy bodily from his feet and hurling him against Ten-Ichi, and so sending them both to the floor.

The way was clear for him then, and he made use of the opportunity.

With one leap, he reached the door and pulled it open, and he had passed out and was closing it after him, when Chick sprang across the room and seized the knob on the inner side of the door.

For a moment after that both men pulled at it desperately, without either obtaining the advantage; and then the doctor released his hold suddenly—so suddenly that Chick was thrown back, and almost upon the floor, by the reaction.

But, in the meantime, Patsy and Ten-Ichi had regained their feet, and Nick had snapped handcuffs on the wrists of the woman, and so now all four of the detectives leaped toward the door at once.

The enemy was not seeking to escape, however. Reenforcements had arrived, or had been waiting just beyond the door in anticipation of this moment.

As Nick and his assistants rushed forward, the doorway was filled from without, and before any of the detectives could reach it, the doctor had reentered the room, followed by Ironarm and half a dozen of the men attendants in the doctor's employ.

There was no time to use weapons of any sort, and, strangely enough, there was not one in sight, save for the fact that two of the attendants carried short bludgeons, with which, no doubt, they were accustomed to bring refractory patients to terms.

It was instantly evident to the detective that Ironarm and the doctor relied upon the force of numbers, and upon their own strength of muscle, to subdue Nick Carter and his assistants.

There was, perhaps, reason for this, for they were exactly two to one.

But even the big doctor could not stand up under a blow from that terrible right fist of the detective's. He caught it directly on the point of the chin, and he went down and out as one might drop a wet cloth to the floor.

One of the attendants received a like blow from Chick, and another collapsed from a blow in the stomach delivered with his left arm.

Ten-Ichi made use of his knowledge of ju-jutsu; he threw one of the men bodily over his head in time to receive another in such a way that he snapped his forearm for him as if it had been a pipe-stem.

Patsy had toppled his man over on the floor, and was pummeling him to his heart's content, and, when the remaining attendant would have gone to his rescue, he received a blow under the ear from Chick which effectually settled him.

And, in the meantime, Ironarm had followed the doc-

tor in the attack upon Nick Carter, and the moment the keeper of the sanitarium was floored by the detective's blow Ironarm leaped forward and grappled with Nick, managing to take him somewhat at a disadvantage, too.

What might have been the outcome of that particular struggle will never be known, for it came to a sudden close in an astounding and unexpected manner.

At the very beginning of the fight, Elsie had leaped away into a corner of the room, almost paralyzed with terror.

But she had seen the detective when he tore the revolver from Rose Danton's grasp and threw it back upon the bed; and now, as the fight progressed, and particularly when Ironarm grappled with the detective, she crept forward toward it and secured it.

Then she turned, with the pistol in her hand.

She saw the detective struggling with the Frenchman—and for the moment she saw nothing else in that room.

Like a spirit, she glided across it, and paused for an instant near the two struggling men, who were still upon their feet, each endeavoring to throw the other.

Then, deliberately, she raised the weapon, holding it by the barrel, and with that delicate precision with which one might drive a nail she brought the butt of it down with all the strength she possessed squarely on the top of Ironarm's skull.

That blow of Elsie's ended the fight.

Chick, and Patsy, and Ten-Ichi turned to the assistance of their chief just as it fell—just as Ironarm sank in a heap to the floor, unconscious from the force of the blow.

"You are a brave girl, Elsie!" exclaimed Nick, and he reached out a hand toward her.

But she was staring past him toward the door, and now she called out:

"Look! Look! She is escaping!"

It was Rose to whom Elsie called their attention.

She had seen her opportunity, and she was making the most of it.

Handcuffed as she was, she fled to the doorway and passed through it, and then she sped along the corridor of the building with all the speed she could command.

Calling to the others to look after the prisoners, and see that none escaped, Nick pursued her, for it instantly occurred to him that this woman, with the fiendish proclivities, now that she realized that her last card was played, would seek to avenge herself upon the innocent cause of it all—Madelaine.

The building was a large one, having many corridors, and they sped down one, across another, up a third, thence through a doorway which opened upon a flight of stairs, and then along other hallways and corridors on the next higher floor.

And all the time, despite his efforts, Nick could gain but little upon the fleeing woman.

But he did gain somewhat, so that when, at last, she halted before one of the doors and threw back with her manacled hands the bolts which fastened it, he was only a few yards behind her.

She managed to enter the room before he could reach her, and she attempted to close the door after her; but he was too quick for that.

He seized upon it and jerked it from her grasp just as she turned and dashed toward Madelaine, who was lying, fully dressed, upon a couch, apparently lifeless.

But now all thought of vengeance was gone from the mind of Rose Danton.

Too late she realized that the detective was hot upon her heels, and, instead of pausing beside the couch whereon Madelaine was lying, she dashed past it and through another door at the side of the room, with the detective still in pursuit.

This door opened upon a short hallway, which led to a balcony, and before Nick could overtake her Rose had pulled open the outer door and dashed through it.

Nor did she hesitate even then.

She ran with all speed directly to the railing around the balcony, and, without so much as a backward glance, she leaped into the air, clearing the railing, and diving, head downward, from that third story of the house to the stone flagging of the courtyard below.

Nick turned away, with a shudder.

He knew that it was all over with Rose Danton; he knew that she could not survive that madwoman's leap.

He returned to the room then where he had seen Madelaine, and, lifting her in his arms, he carried her tenderly along the corridors and down the stairs, and again along other corridors, until he arrived at the room where he had left Chick, and Elsie, and the others.

"Go," he said to Patsy and Ten-Ichi, "into the courtyard. Rose has killed herself. You will find her there. If there is life left in her, do all that can be done to relieve her suffering."

Reader, this ends the story of that remarkable French crook which was entered in Nick Carter's books under the caption, "Praxatel of the Iron Arm." And it may as well be told here that it also brought to a close the career of Ironarm, otherwise known as Herman Praxatel, for that interesting person found a way to take his own life, soon after that, in prison.

Rose Danton was quite dead when they picked her up. Her neck was broken and many of her bones were fractured. She was never conscious after she struck that flagging.

There were two persons who succeeded in making good their escape. They were Vera Verona and the woman who was called Hawthorne Praxatel. How or when they accomplished it is not known, but it is to be presumed that they fled the moment that Nick Carter and his assistants appeared on the scene.

Madelaine and Elsie were taken to their home at once, where Madelaine speedily recovered from the effects of her terrible experiences under the ministrations of Elsie, who could never forgive herself that even for a moment she had permitted herself to be deceived by the machinations of her enemies.

Doctor Carringford and his attendants were sent to prison for their part in the affair, and the sanitarium ceased to exist as such.

It may as well be remarked here that Peter, the coachman, retained his place, for he was thoroughly repentant for the part he had played. The instant he saw Nick Carter, on his return to the city, he said pathetically:

"Mr. Carter, that red-headed feller never showed up at all. Not once."

THE END.

The next issue—No. 501—will be "The Man from Montana; or, Nick Carter and the Craven of Gold," ready next week.

ABOUT THE EARLY NUMBERS OF THE

TIP TOP WEEKLY

We receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 200 are entirely out of print. We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We give herewith a complete list of all stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine colored catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

MEDAL LIBRARY	
No.	
150—Frank Merriwell's Schooldays.	
167—Frank Merriwell's Chums.	
178—Frank Merriwell's Foes.	
184—Frank Merriwell's Trip West.	
189—Frank Merriwell Down South.	
193—Frank Merriwell's Bravery.	
197—Frank Merriwell's Hunting Tour.	
201—Frank Merriwell in Europe.	
205—Frank Merriwell at Yale.	
209—Frank Merriwell's Sports Afield.	
213—Frank Merriwell's Races.	
217—Frank Merriwell's Bicycle Tour.	
225—Frank Merriwell's Courage.	
229—Frank Merriwell's Daring.	
233—Frank Merriwell's Athletes.	
237—Frank Merriwell's Skill.	
240—Frank Merriwell's Champions.	
244—Frank Merriwell's Return to Yale.	
247—Frank Merriwell's Secret.	
251—Frank Merriwell's Danger.	
254—Frank Merriwell's Loyalty.	
258—Frank Merriwell in Camp.	
262—Frank Merriwell's Vacation.	
267—Frank Merriwell's Cruise.	

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271—Frank Merriwell's Chase.	
276—Frank Merriwell in Maine.	
280—Frank Merriwell's Struggle.	
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288—Frank Merriwell's Opportunity.	
292—Frank Merriwell's Hard Luck.	
296—Frank Merriwell's Protégé.	
300—Frank Merriwell on the Road.	
304—Frank Merriwell's Own Company.	
308—Frank Merriwell's Fame.	
312—Frank Merriwell's College Chums.	
316—Frank Merriwell's Problem.	
320—Frank Merriwell's Fortune.	
324—Frank Merriwell's New Comedian.	
328—Frank Merriwell's Prosperity.	
332—Frank Merriwell's Stage Hit.	
336—Frank Merriwell's Great Scheme.	
340—Frank Merriwell in England.	
344—Frank Merriwell on the Boulevards.	
348—Frank Merriwell's Duel.	
352—Frank Merriwell's Double Shot.	
356—Frank Merriwell's Baseball Victories.	
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362—Frank Merriwell's Auto.	
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480—The Tong of the Tailless Dragon; or, Nick Carter's Close Shave.
481—The Padlocked Mystery; or, Nick Carter and the Death Plot Trap.
482—Dema, the Dangerous; or, Nick Carter's Chase to Paris.
483—Nick Carter's Murder Problem; or, A Hide-and-Seek Game with the Dead.
484—A Battle Among the Clouds; or, Nick Carter's Criminal Client.
485—The Veiled Princess; or, Nick Carter's Secret Accomplishment.
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498—Following An Ocean Trail; or, Nick Carter's Chase After Pirates.
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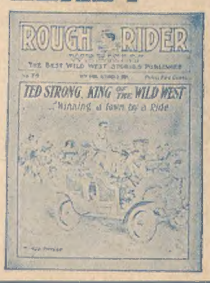

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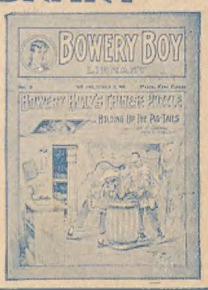

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